#15 October 2002

border line

The Comics Magazine

BIG INTERVIEW ISSUE!

Kurt Busiek - Invisible Avenger
Jamie Rich - The Oni Overview!
Doug TenNapel

Plus mini-interviews with:
Schreck, Simone, Dela Cruz, Allred, Naifeh, Brereton, Krall, Dini, Hawthorne, Johnston, and Clugston-Major!

Peter Milligan & Brett Ewins talk Johnny Nemo

Also inside this issue:
Alex Toth remembered
Al Davison's latest project
Nigel Lowrey - Young Gun
The Mighty Crusaders - an overview!
Marvel dot comics
- the man behind the success

Also inside your new-look Borderline:
new columns, more pages of reviews than ever before, Comics 2040, Miffy and actually quite a bit more...

borderline
THE COMICS MAGAZINE

Published by *Borderline Media Ltd.*
Each NEW issue is available to download for FREE from the following URL:
http://borderline.mediahall.co.uk
Back issues are $1.00 from the following URL:
http://borderline.mediahall.co.uk/backissues.html

Martin Shipp ..... publisher
(martin.shipp@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
Phil Hall ..... editor
(editorial@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
Mike Kidson ..... assistant editor
(mike.kidson@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
Andy Winter ..... reviews editor
(reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
Mike Sivier & Jay Eales ..... news editors
(news@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
(jay.eales@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
John Parkinson ..... webmaster
(webmaster@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)
Dan Black ..... publicity
(publicity@borderline.mediahall.co.uk)

This month's thanks go to: Doug TenNapel, Chris Staros, Brett Warnock, The Cornish Tourist Board, John L. Roberts, John Parkinson, the entire Borderline editorial and contributors team for continuing to do such an awesome job for bugger all - well, things are about to change!

Cover design by the believably busy Jim Campbell, Sidekicks original cover art by Takeshi Miyazawa! She can be my sidekick, baby!

Next issue: an exclusive interview with an elusive figure; the conclusion of the Oni Overview; Ann Nocenti; and Marvel's pizza delivery boy - Joey da Q! Be here in 31.

Editorial (snail mail) address:
BORDERLINE, 45 Fullingdale Road,
The Headlands, Northampton,
NN3 2PZ England
Advertising and editorial queries call
01604 513867 or e-mail
phil.hall@borderline.mediahall.co.uk

For all the latest news and comics chat - sign up to:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/comics_unintentional

Unless otherwise stated the copyright of all material that is published in this PDF product lies with the individual authors, creators or their employers. No part of this publication should therefore be reproduced, or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including printing or photocopying, or by any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright holder(s) and the editor of **Borderline** magazine. This document may be printed out for your personal, home use. However distribution via a CD or Internet connection to anyone who has not seen it is no longer allowed.

BORDERLINES POINT & CLICK INDEX

IN THIS ISSUE..

It's That Man Again – *Phil Hall compares Cornwall to the comics industry.* 3

Invisible Avenger – *Danny Black talks to Kurt Busiek about stuff from the past, present and future.* 4

The Blank Page – *Andrew Cheverton is Borderline's columnist without portfolio. See him rant!* 8

In a League of Their Oni – *Jay Eales takes on the whole of Oni, while Chev gets down to the nitty gritty with Jamie Rich. The first part of the definitive guide to the hippest indie publisher in the States...* 9

Issues – *Borderline's rottweiler bitch talks Superman. Yep, you read us correctly.* 20

Not such a little Nemo? – *Jay Eales talks to Peter Milligan and Brett Ewins about the Cyberosia re-emergence of* ***Johnny Nemo****...* 21

In Search of... – *David McLintock's Internet odyssey for classic artists continues with Alex Toth.* 22

Al Davison - *new projects and delights from the top creator, plus an anecdotal tale of small press snobbery!* 24

Fantastic Fixelations - *Mike Sivier talks to John D. Roberts – the man behind Marvel Dotcomics!* 25

Transatlantic Meditations - *Arnold T. Blumberg ponders All Hallows' Eve (or Halloween for all you uneducated).* 28

Miffy - *Ady Kermode and Terry Wiley's sexy young airhead in an amusing tale of things you find free on magazine covers.* 29

Kate's Tits - *Ande Morgensen discusses how Kate Winslet's breasts are partly responsible for the death of the entertainment industry!* 30

Comics Milestones – *Mike Kidson looks at the key moments in Silver and Golden Age comics!* 31

What Is Manga? *Not anymore – Kevin Hill introduces us to* ***Eastern Promises****, a real box of delights...* 32

The Mighty Crusaders – *Mike Kidson looks at a comics series that has failure ingrained in its history...* 33

12 O'Clock Lock – *Selina Lock is away with the fairies!* 36

Comics 2040 – *Comicbook nonsense from 2040 brought to you by the local madam's friend Paul ('I know a thing or two about butcher's hooks, me') Rainey. We still don't know what he's on... but we still want some!* 37

The Verdict – ***Borderline****'s jury of reviewers – unleashed in a new-look, more in-depth, exploration of this month's top comicbook releases!* 38

Graphic Examination – *What is the top graphic novel this month? In Phil Hall's opinion there can be only one choice...* 45

Creature Feature – *A talk with* ***Creature Tech****'s Doug TenNapel – the man who invented Earthworm Jim!* . 46

The Collected Verdict – *This month's latest trade paperback and graphic novel releases dissected for you!* 48

Zine Seen – *Still the world's leading review column for the small press!* .. 53

Judge For Yourself – *A review round-up of the latest Big Finish audio adventures!* 55

Young Guns – *Nigel Lowrey has been knocking on the door for years. Perhaps with the massive exposure he'll get from this he'll make that transition to being a leading professional.* 56

Man on a Mission – *Martin Shipp talks about journalistic contempt for comics and how the source material is often forgotten when something is critically acclaimed.* 59

Drawing Board – *Graeme N. Reid is so modest he thought he should have been a Young Gun!* 60

World of Heros – *Chris Spicer and his satirical news coverage...* 63

The Cover Story - Sidekicks by J. Torres & Takeshi Miyazawa, part of the Oni stable of titles. We thought this image was so good we couldn't resist using it. Be sure to read all 22 mini-interviews (11 this month and 11 next) with all Oni's top creators!

IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN

Yadda yadda yadda... Editors are always banging on about something no one gives a fig about...

I'VE just had a whole two weeks away from comics and it's been great! Of course, the problems all came piling in when I got back and found I had an entire issue to get together, plus the return to my day job and trying to get out of that vacation mindset.

I was enjoying the unexpected late summer sunshine, in the picturesque setting of Cornwall – with its history of legends and folklore – while reading the latest Stephen King thriller, and I'd left the world of comics behind completely (although I did sneak a couple of Top Shelf graphic novels along but had them confiscated straight away by my wife).

Guess what?

Cornwall *and* no comics was great!

I don't mean that in a bad way, I love comics, as do all of you. But... well, you know? Taking a break from something is at times far better for you than any other form of relaxation.

I've been spending far too much time banging on about me and Borderline and inconsequential issues in this editorial section, and not enough time talking about the medium that has united us all – from the Peoples' Republic of China to Andorra to the United Arab Emirates. Comics are important.

I'd like us all to realise that actual comicbooks are far more important than this or any other magazine, or the myriad websites or the web personalities who may feel, in their minds, that they have become far more important to comics than the pamphlets themselves. The problem is we all tend to lose sight of that, especially, I'm really sorry to say, our American cousins who also can see no other comic industry than their own. The biggest problem with the success of *Spider-Man*? It appears to give solidity to the argument that superhero comics really are the only thing read by comics readers. I've harped on about this before but let's be straight about this: Amazing Spider-Man sells about 75,000 copies per month (it may well sell many more thanks to international syndication) whereas anything from Japan will sell 10 times that figure every week. Comics sales in a Third World country like Brazil are higher in one month than in an entire year in the USA.

Comics are big business.

Really BIG business. Publishers have made incredible fortunes from comics – and I'm not talking about Todd McFarlane buying a set of once-used baseballs, I'm talking about publishers who have so much money they give more to charities in a year than McFarlane can blow on toys.

Comics are huge. Seriously massive. Comics are far more important than me, far more important than a single publisher, far more important than Jean Giraud, Jack Kirby, Alan Moore, Igor Kordey, Maurice de Bévère, Mauricio de Sousa, Grzegorz Rosinski, Masamune Shirow, Dylan Horrocks or any of the great comicbook creators from any country on the face of the planet. The only thing more important than the medium is its fans. You are the lifeblood and the future of comics – whatever the industry evolves or devolves into.

Now, enough of this, the stuff you don't want to read. On with the show...

Writers such as Daphne Du Maurier lived in Cornwall and it is understandable, considering how evocative and inspirational its coastline is. But when you go inland and discover areas covered in grey prefab housing it becomes just like everywhere else! Not the setting for a fantastic comicbook – more like a dismal kitchen sink drama!

A Cornish road to somewhere. There has only ever been one comic store in the area.

NUCOMIX

THE SMALL PRESS ANTHOLOGY WITH BIG AMBITIONS

Price: £1.50 (includes p+p - cheques payable to S. Bowland)

Website: http://www.nucomix.co.uk (online ordering available)

Address: NuComix, c/o Si Bowland 7 Waterside Close, Madeley, Cheshire CW3 9TH Email: orders@nucomix.fsnet.co.uk

Frequency: Monthly

INVISIBLE AVENGER

THE BUSIEK INTERVIEW

AFTER years of writing one-shots, mini series and generally pinch-hitting for the big American publishers, Kurt Busiek rocketed into mainstream stardom with Marvels, a collaboration with Alex Ross that made both men names to be reckoned with. Since then he's revived Iron Man and created the Thunderbolts for Marvel Comics, choreographed Harris's Vampirella, designed Astro City for Homage and has watched the rise and fall of the creator-owned Gorilla comics imprint. Recently he's retired from a second stint of writing Marvel's The Avengers and won plaudits for his Avengers Forever maxi. Despite suffering from a very nasty sinus infection that troubles him for months at a time, Busiek has recently been creating and writing The Power Company for DC Comics alongside artist Tom Grummett. Kurt has been working on this concept since 1983 and the team are about to get a new member (not The Haunted Tank!) as of issue #11. As if all that wasn't enough, Busiek is also working on the long-awaited Avengers/JLA story with his former collaborator on the Avengers monthly, George Perez.

Borderline's Dan Black catches the hardest-working man in comics during a rare spare moment and makes him work that little bit harder.

BORDERLINE: I've read that it took 11 years until you "hit the big time" with Marvels. Were there ever times when you considered quitting?
KURT BUSIEK: You know, I don't think so. There were times it was difficult, and I had to find work outside the comics industry to support myself. I worked at Burger King, as an assistant editor at a small book publishing company, and as a literary agent, but I was always plugging away at comics, too. Even when I was writing some prose fiction, and thinking about breaking in as a novelist, I still worked on comics.

Maybe I'm just stupid that way. Or maybe I had enough of a trickle of work to keep me from ever considering packing it in and focusing totally on other things.

BL: Gorilla [an attempt by Busiek and others at publishing a line of creator-owned comics] was an ambitious project that unfortunately didn't work out. But you've still managed to walk away from the situation with a blossoming career and top projects. Would you consider trying it again?
KB: Depends on what you mean. We didn't go into Gorilla expecting to be financing it ourselves - we had a business partner who was supposed to be supplying funding for it all. It turned out, though, that he had no money, though some shell games were played to make it look as if he did. So we only discovered that we had no financial backing whatsoever after we'd already solicited our first issues.

We made the decision to keep going, to do our best to put out the books we'd promised to put out, rather than pass our disappointment on to the fans, and I'm proud that Stuart and I were able to get all of the Shockrockets mini and the Superstar one-shot out as planned.

But we never chose that situation knowingly, and wouldn't have gone into it like that if we'd known there was no money. We'd have taken one of the other offers we had, from

The photo-realism of Alex Ross – a cover to Kurt Busiek's Astro City.

existing publishers. So if the question is, "Would I try a creator-owned line backed by actual financing, like Gorilla was supposed to be?" then sure, I would - I'd just be more careful about that financing. If the question is, "Would you take out another mortgage on your house to finance books you never expected to be financing?" then the answer is, "I sure hope not."

Self-publishing, whether through Image or elsewhere, would be an option if I had the money to comfortably devote to it - it worked out well with Astro City, and while it didn't work out as well with Shockrockets and Superstar, I'm not sorry we did it. I'd just be wary about doing it a third time without far more preparation.

BL: Despite the company folding, fans have put Shockrockets and Superstar back in demand. Does this mean that a Busiek/ Immonen reunion is possible?
KB: Oh, there'll definitely be more Busiek/Immonen comics. We're working on something now, though it hasn't been announced yet. And more Superstar and Shockrockets would be nice - I'd very much hope we'll be doing them someday.

BL: As a professional, what are your views on how to stop the falling numbers of comics readers? As an industry, have we done everything possible to stop people walking away in recent years?
KB: I don't think we've done it in a concerted way, no. But there've been lots and lots of steps taken by various people - Larry Young and AiT, and the other people doing more and more original graphic novels; Marvel and CrossGen and others putting comics on the web, Free Comics Day; a renewed, if not entirely successful, focus on making the comics accessible to newcomers; more comics aimed at different kinds of readers, and so on.

I don't have any hard-and-fast answers - if I did, I'd be off saving the industry myself - but I think we've got to work on doing stories that appeal to larger audiences, making them both entertaining and understandable, publishing them in affordable formats (not necessarily cheap, but formats that offer value for money - this is a big problem), and getting them into people's faces, whether by getting them to come into comics shops, getting the comics out to where the potential customers are, getting free or cheap previews out there like the ten-cent Batman and the various web-samples, and so on. Make something they'll like, in a format they're willing to buy, let 'em know it's there and give them a free taste. That's the basic recipe, I'd say.

More diversity of subject matter and target audience goes hand in hand with this.

I'd also say that the trick isn't to keep people from "walking away" - our audience is already too small, and much of the problem has been caused by doing more and more to try (usually ineffectually) to hang onto the audience we've got, and making the comics more and more forbidding to newcomers as a result. I think we need to reach out, to welcome in new readers. Without a source of new readers, what do we do when the existing ones die?

So ultimately, I'd say that doing good, enjoyable comics will keep the existing readers happy - they already know where to find us, and are willing to pick up the books. But we need others as well, and our promo focus should be on reaching them, not on trying to get X-Men readers to buy Batman, and vice versa.

BL: I've got to come clean; I haven't read Astro City despite it being recommended to me. Now I'm catching up with some trade paperbacks; what can I expect to read?
KB: Stuff you'll really enjoy, I hope!

Astro City is about superheroes - but not really about the adventures. It's a city that's got a healthy population of superheroes, super-villains, monsters, mad scientists, innocent bystanders and more - and through the stories, we explore what life would be like in such a world. We've told stories from the viewpoint of heroes, of villains, of alien spies, petty crooks, ordinary people, cartoon lions come to life, and more. And on the one hand, it's an exploration of the superhero genre - what else can happen, besides the usual formula? What other kinds of stories can be told? On the other hand, it's the superhero genre as metaphor, as we use the larger-than-life elements of the genre to tell stories about what my high school English teachers liked to call "the human experience."

Beyond that, I don't think there's anything I can tell you that'd work better than reading the stories themselves and seeing how you like 'em. [Other than] that they're the best work I've ever done, the Brent Anderson art is gorgeous, and Alex Ross's cover [art] - and what he contributes to the design of the world and its inhabitants - is mighty fine, too. I think everyone's knocking themselves out on the book, and it shows.

BL: The Power Company is back in the news - you're going to aggressively market the book, basically restart the storyline and add a DC hero to the ranks. Bold moves. Did this decision come from you and Tom [Grummett] or from DC?
KB: Not so much restarting the story as re-focusing it, getting to the stuff we should have been focusing on all along.

And the plan came from me and Tom, to start with. DC had already given us plenty of promotion - a big

More Alex Ross art to Kurt Busiek's Astro City. Notice the similarity between this and another series?

banner rollout with lots of bells and whistles - so we really couldn't expect them to do even more. But the series wasn't selling like anybody hoped it would, and the reader reaction, both online and in the mail, was pretty consistent. People liked the basic idea of the book, but they were turned off by our multi-book start-up, with all the one-shots for each team member, and they were disappointed that the first storyline didn't seem to be all that different from something they could get out of a more conventional superhero team. What they liked was the idea of superheroes as professionals, dealing with the positives and negatives of a business setting, but that first story was too much "superhero" and not enough "business."

So that was my fault - not only did I write that opening story, but the multi-book launch was my dumbass idea. Oops. As we moved along, though, more and more readers started to react better to it - each month, we'd hear "This is the best issue yet!" We even started to hear people saying that we were one of the best books at DC. So clearly, what we were doing was working - we'd just gotten off on the wrong foot, and needed to get people to try the series again, even if they'd been turned off by the launch or that first story.

So that's why the promotion - we're pretty confident that we can do the stories people want to read; we just need to get them to look at the book and find out that we're doing it. So we came up with a big splashy event within the series itself: Josiah Power is the guy that keeps the team stable, keeps them running smoothly and professionally. If we take him out of the picture, everything starts to fall apart, and the other partners - Skyrocket, Witchfire and Manhunter - have to find a way to run the business themselves. That's what happens in the *Power Loss* two-parter in #8-9 - we drop three people with very, very, very different motivations and personalities into the deep end, and let them fend for themselves. The result will be an immediate and dramatic focus on the business side of the book, and on the personalities that make it go - all the stuff that makes The Power Company different from other books out there.

So we're beating the drums for that - we ran a giveaway contest to get retailers looking at us again, giving away stuff we hope they'll pass along to their customers, including signed books and original art. And we've got a new member joining a few issues later - that was another complaint we got a lot, that there weren't enough already familiar characters in the book - and DC was kind enough to run an online poll for us, getting readers involved in the question of who the new member should be. That new member shows up in #11, and we knew who it was going to be right from the get-go - but we still ran a poll, with the promise that if the new member didn't win, whoever did win would at least show up in the book.

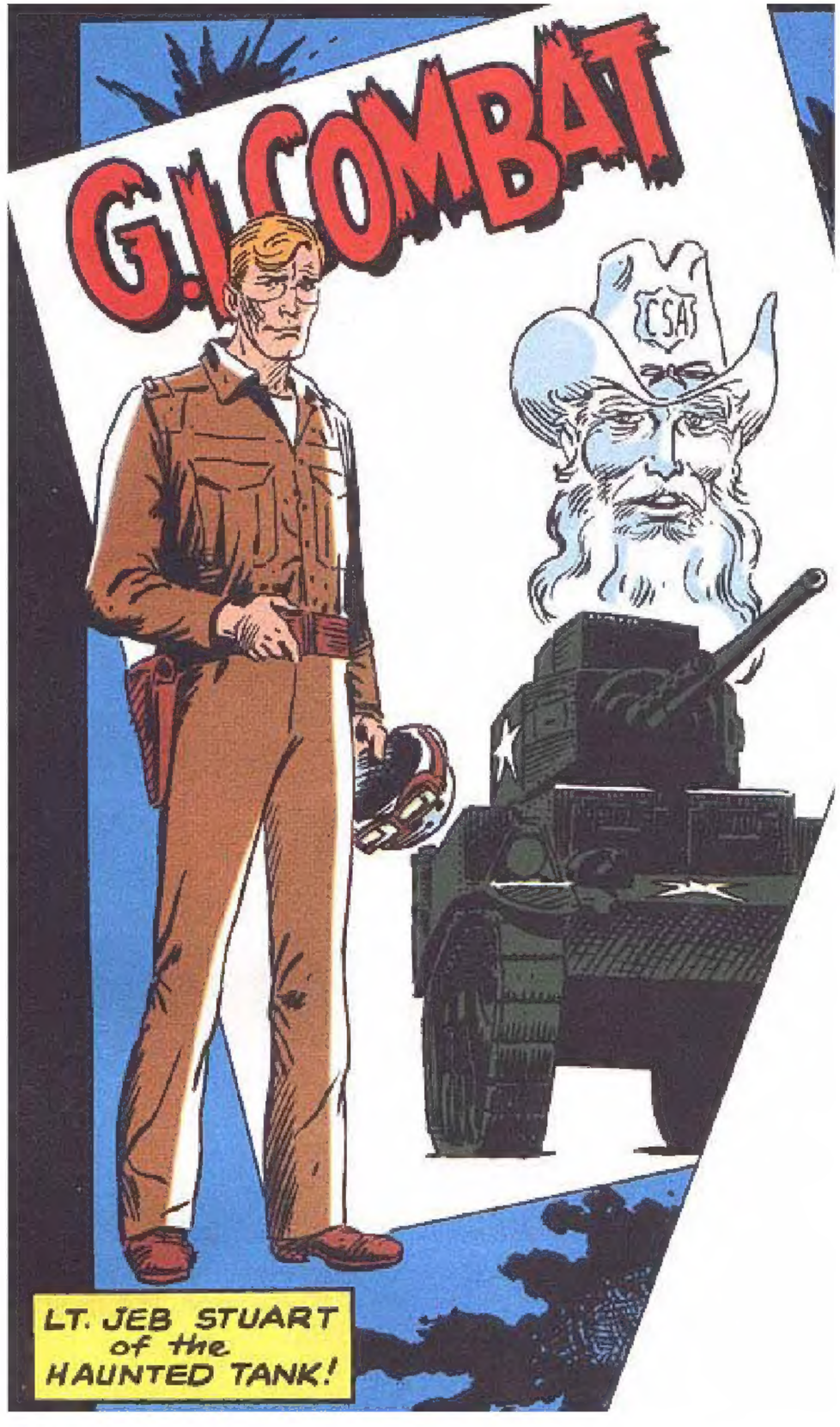
The results of the poll were just announced as I write this - the choices were Booster Gold, Batgirl, Firestorm, Superboy and the Haunted Tank. Perhaps because they knew that the actual new member had been chosen, online fans lined up behind the oddball choice, and the Haunted Tank squeaked into a last-minute victory over Firestorm. So the Haunted Tank will indeed be showing up - not as the new member, but in an unusual role a little further down the line.

And after that, our next solo spotlight issue is on Manhunter, as he clashes with Batman in Gotham City, in a story beautifully drawn by Gary Chaloner, the man behind Will Eisner's John Law, Detective, and Red Kelso on the web. And we've got more coming.

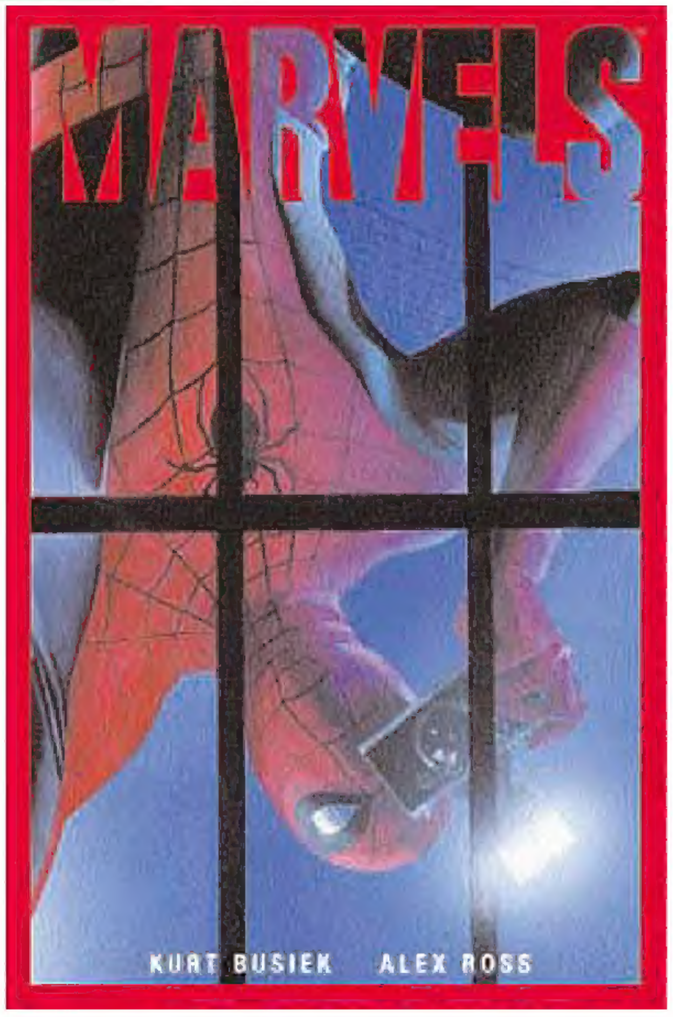
We want to stay nice and loud and noticeable, until we've attracted enough readers and gotten them to see what we're doing...

BL: You recently said goodbye to the monthly Avengers title, after over 50 issues. It's a creative run that shames a lot of current professionals who don't have that staying power. How do you find the energy and inspiration to fuel over fifty issues?
KB: I don't know - I'm tempted just to say, "You keep writing one a month. Four years and two months later, you'll be at #50."

For my part, I don't know why more people don't stick around that long. I'm a long-term planner - nice long runs of books by a single creator or team are among my



The Haunted Tank (by Joe Kubert), soon to be a feature in Busiek's latest project.



The comic that launched Busiek into comics super-stardom.

favorites, and one of my ambitions is to be on a series as long as Milt Caniff was on Terry and the Pirates. So when I start a series, I make all kinds of big plans, and don't have any trouble finding the inspiration for four years' worth of stories or more. Avengers is the first book I've hit that mark on, but that's been due to illness more than lack of inspiration - I still had plenty of Thunderbolts and Iron Man stories to tell; I just couldn't keep going physically.

Six issues is a drop in the bucket. Even two years on a book, the way comics are paced these days, covers about as much stuff as you'd get in five months, back when I was a kid. So I don't think what I did on Avengers should be unusual - it's those other guys, all slackers and gadabouts, hopping from project to project. Settle down, guys! Let's see a magnum opus, not just another one-big-story-and-I'm-gone!

BL: Avengers Forever was lapped up by fans. A similar idea was used in [the Marvel miniseries] Exiles. Are the X-Men a set of characters that interest you?
KB: I like the concept behind the X-Men, and I like a lot of the characters. There's a lot of characters I can't stand, though - Gambit? Maggott? - and about twenty years' worth of back continuity that I mostly skipped out on. I wouldn't mind doing an X-project someday, but I'd want to do something different, something that's not in the usual mold of intramural mutant free-for-alls, that lose sight of the fact that these guys are supposed to be trying to make the world a better place, not just whining about it.

I have been enjoying what I've read of Grant Morrison's run, though - haven't read it all, but what I've read has seemed to me to be getting back to the core ideas.

BL: I'm risking hate mail if I don't mention the forthcoming Avengers/JLA. What are you allowed to tell us about it?
KB: It's gorgeous. And it'll be scheduled when it's almost done.

Beyond that, I want everyone to be surprised, to take it all in fresh. But hey, be on the lookout for the Haunted Tank - I hear it's gonna be a major player in the DCU!

BL: Switching to another title that you worked on, I've been speaking with the Vampirella crew recently. What separates 'Rella from the hordes of other "bad girl" comics, in your opinion?
KB: Depends on what kind of stories she's in. Back when she first started out, she was just a flirty little sexpot, introducing stories. But when Archie Goodwin took the series over, he made it smart - an atmospheric, involving horror/adventure series. His Vampi was strong, intelligent, capable and resourceful, and surrounded by a solid cast of supporting characters. If they do that kind of thing with her - make her the hero of smart, well-crafted adventures - then that's the difference right there.

If it's all about her tits hanging out of her skimpy costume, though, and everybody trying to get into her abbreviated panties - then who cares if there's a difference? It won't be worth reading anyway.

BL: Once you've met your deadlines, what do you enjoy doing to relax?
KB: Oh, I haven't met my deadlines for years.

But on the theory that someday I might - my favorite thing to do to relax is get out on the water. Get me out on a sailboat, a cruise ship, or even a ferry, and the tension just goes right out of me, and I start grinning. It must be genetic - my mother lived on a sailboat for years, and my father's a dedicated weekend sailor. I think the perfect place for me to live would be on an island.

Best vacation I ever took was right after a round of surgery - my wife and I went on a cruise to recuperate, on a clipper ship that spent the whole time under sail, not farting around with motors. Hanging out in the bow by moonlight, with the ship angled over and skimming along with the wind, while a pod of dolphins races alongside the boat, jumping out of the water... that's my idea of perfect peace.

BL: What have been your favourite film, CD and TV programme recently?
KB: The last two movies I've seen more than once in a theater are *Lilo & Stitch* and *Lord of the Rings*. We just got the DVD of *Lord of the Rings*, too, and I'm consistently blown away by how well they realized the world. Before that, the last movies to make my favorites list were *As Good As It Gets* and *Good Will Hunting*.

I've been too busy and too under the weather to seek out new music, so I rarely buy new CDs. I have a replica 1947 Wurlitzer jukebox in my office, fitted out for a hundred CDs, and I just put that on "random" and let it play all day long. My single favorite set of CDs, though, is probably the Stiff Records boxed set, with Nick Lowe, Dave Edmunds, Wreckless Eric and more.

As for TV - no contest. *The West Wing*. The writing's great, the characters are great, the actors are great, it doesn't feel like anything I've seen before - what more can I ask? It may be the best TV show of all time.

BL: And finally, DC and Marvel honour you by giving you ownership of whatever character you want. Who do you pick and why?
KB: Oh, my sentimental side would want me to grab Hal Jordan or Hawkeye, but my pragmatic side would talk me out of it. I'd pick Superman, purely on crass economic grounds. Then the income from licensing Big Blue would set my family up in a nice comfortable place where we didn't have to worry about finances. And I'd keep writing comics, because that's what I love to do - I'd just be doing it on a deck, looking out over the ocean somewhere...

BL: Name the boat after us, Kurt! Many thanks for taking time to speak to us.

Vampirella is a comic that Busiek revived after 10 years in comicbook limbo!
We only used this picture because it gave us an excuse to...

THE BLANK PAGE

Andrew 'Chev' Cheverton is Borderline's columnist without portfolio...

SIGNAL TO NOISE?

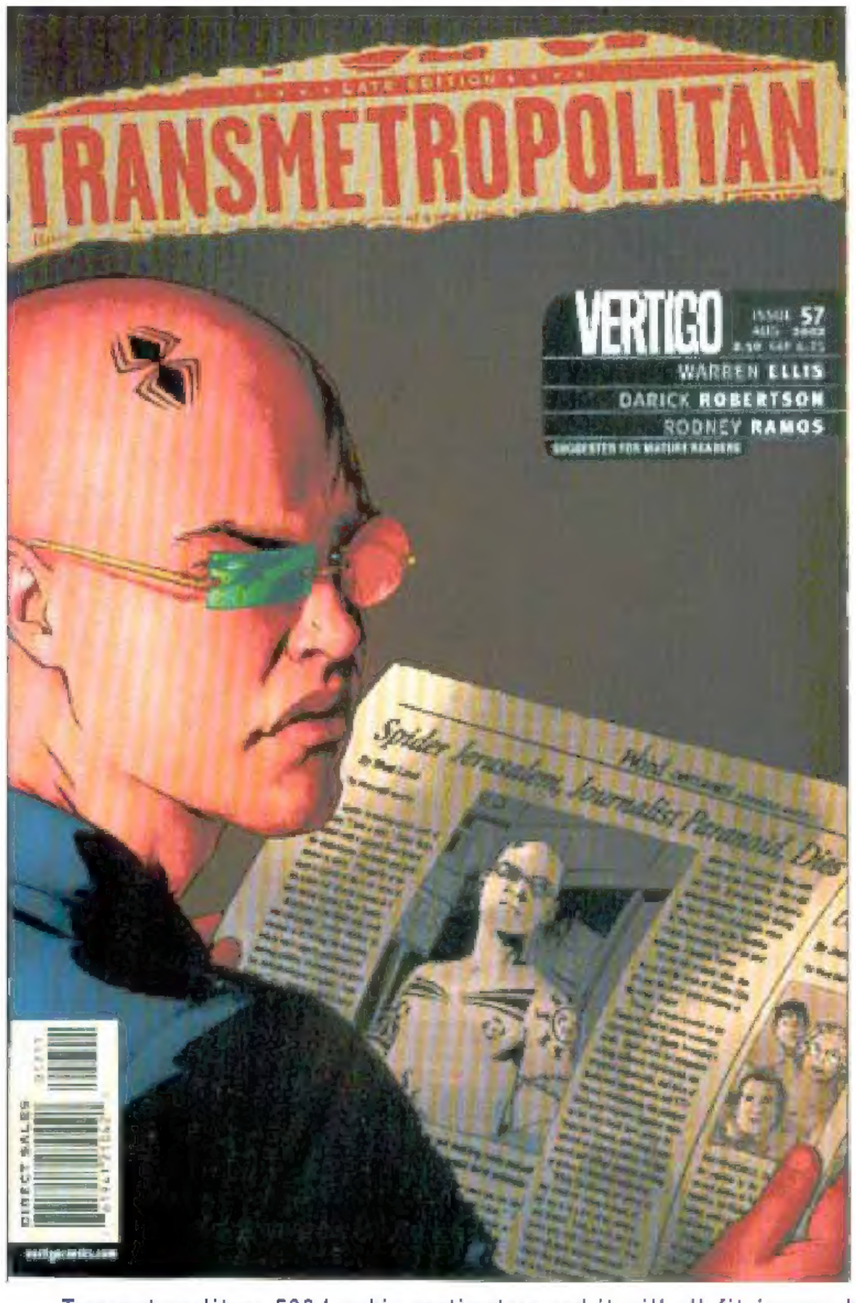
WHEN you read, your brain works. When you watch television or a movie, your brain tends not to work. You may have noticed this. With a novel, the author's writing interacts with your brain to form *your* interpretation of the story. Everybody who reads **The Lord of the Rings** comes away with a different version in their memory. It's a deliberately flawed and amorphous information transferral system, requiring the recipients to construe their own versions of the story. Movies, on the other hand, tend to be extremely literal, showing you everything as the creators intend and leaving the audience little room for intellectual manoeuvre or interpretation. Comics offer the malleable reading experience of a novel, but within the set and organised environments of a movie, so that you are in no doubt as to exactly what the characters look like or where they are, or what they are doing. Which is a bit weird.

You see, I finally read J. Michael Straczynski's **Midnight Nation**. Twelve issues and (in the forthcoming trade collection) 288 pages, which took me exactly 95 minutes to read, putting it - as far as time commitment goes - in the region of a prose short story or, if we were to be generous, a novella. Whether you've bought the comics or the trade, **Midnight Nation** will cost you around $30. Is that value for money? It's a bit more than you'd pay for a hardback novel, but a novel would last you considerably longer, and contain more actual story. What, exactly, is the difference between a story that you download into your head from a comic, or from a novel? Does the transfer time affect the data, and how much of the story did you insert as you read the author's words?

That which you read, you can interpret as you wish; that which you see is literal and immoveable. Comics - and **Midnight Nation** in particular - offer a sort of literary shorthand, wherein the plot is sketched in around a definite location. Despite taking place over the course of a year, **Midnight Nation** jumps forward weeks or even months in time, without any explanation of what the characters have experienced or learned, making such aspects as the male protagonist's final declaration of love to his female counterpart a little hard to believe. Unlike the progressive chapters of a novel, each issue of **Midnight Nation** tends to read very much like a short story, direct and to the point, and all of these short stories add up to form a longer short story but not, in any real sense, a novel: it has far too many narrative gaps for that. Neil Gaiman's **The Sandman** could lay claim to being a comic novel, but it would be a novel for which the reader would have to pay almost $200 to read; and **Preacher**, $140. These comics equivalents of the short story or novella will cost you as much as an entire anthology of prose short stories. The comics equivalents of the novel don't even bear financial comparison to books, unless we enter into the arena of limited editions or first printings. Vast amounts of money are being spent on comics. Perhaps each story or book is worth what we, the consumers, are prepared to pay for it. Is the story contained in three comics equivalent to that contained in one paperback novel? Despite both costing you about the same, will the information gleaned from 72 pages of comics equal that of, say, 300 pages of a book? (The answer is no.) Are you paying for the medium, not the message? Are you even getting a message?

Time and relative dimensions in space… The story that exists after the reading experience comes from a set space: the size of a book or a comic. My collection of **The Sandman** takes up 8892 cubic centimetres of space and cost me approximately $138, but a good estimate of its reading length would be around the 25-hour mark. **Preacher** occupies 7956 cubic centimetres at a cost of $234, and with a reading time of 11 hours. So we can see that **Preacher** takes up less space, but cost me far more and gives me less to read. **The Sandman** takes up quite a bit more space in my universe, though it has cost me less to put it there in monetary terms and offers me more than double the reading value. Both of them also manage to clock up reading times that would not shame any novel, not even those monstrous fat buggers Stephen King writes, seemingly without any editorial interference whatsoever. Look at the space your comics take up and try to remember the entire story, as it now exists in your memory. Pick up a favourite novel and think of how much is contained in such a tiny package. A universe in your hand, or a neighbourhood in your comic box. Or is it all in your mind? Or not? What is the signal to noise ratio?

But, you ask, what does all this mean? Well, I don't know. I just wrote it all down; it's up to you, the reader, to interpret it.



Transmetropolitan: 5304 cubic centimetres and it will all fit in your head.

BLACK AND WHITE AND READ ALL OVER

Jay Eales put in the hours and the graft to ensure that his feature on Oni was as good as many people feel the publisher is. Here's part one...

1997 SAW two Dark Horse employees take the plunge and set up their own publishing imprint, Oni Press. Bob Schreck and Joe Nozemack saw the way in which Dark Horse was beginning to edge out the creator-owned books that had helped to establish their identity, in favour of an increased reliance on licensed properties. Schreck told nextplanet over.com at the time: "I'd spent many years at Dark Horse and Comico, and when I looked out the window and started up Oni with my partner Joe, we said, "Lord knows, the last thing we need to do is another superhero book, because if you're having trouble getting that fix then you're having trouble getting out of your house. What was in desperate need were good stories that had some wallop of emotion to them." Schreck and Nozemack made the decision to only publish books that they loved, a philosophy that remains the touchstone of the company.

With a company logo designed and illustrated by no less a figure than Dave Gibbons, Oni's first book was a collected edition of **Bad Boy** by Frank Miller and Simon Bisley, originally serialised in *GQ* magazine. It was soon followed by **Oni Double Feature**, an anthology title that included filmmaker Kevin Smith's first comics work, with strips based on his *Clerks* characters.

Kevin Smith said of Oni on newsaskew.com: "I's estatic - ESTATIC - to be doing comics with these cats - industry gurus who opted to not complain about the 'lack of...' and instead decided to provide it. Armed with eons of experience in the trenches of the comic book biz and many, many big fans in the way of some of the most respected talents in the medium, Bob Schreck and his partner Joe Nozemack created Oni Press - a company dedicated to shutting everyone up at once by giving the fans something to get their heads around, and the retailers something to sell."

In its first five months, Oni's roster of talent included: Frank Miller, Simon Bisley, Kevin Smith, Matt Wagner, Paul Pope, Gilbert Hernandez, Grant Morrison, Paul Grist, Terry LaBan, Jim Mahfood, Bill Sienkiewicz and the Pander Bros.

With the formation of Oni, a lot of the creators that had worked with Schreck at Dark Horse migrated to the new publisher with him, and as soon as they were able to expand to a three-man outfit, another Dark Horse editor with a longstanding relationship with Schreck jumped aboard: Jamie S. Rich. In those days Oni operated out of Schreck's house, with Schreck, Nozemack and Rich dealing with everything.

One early success for Oni, besides the Smith books, was a tie-in with *The Blair Witch Project*, written by Jen Van Meter (who would later create **Hopeless Savages**) and illustrated by Guy Davis (best known for **Baker Street** and **Sandman Mystery Theatre**). The deal was struck before the film's release, and Oni gambled on an initial print-run of 13,000 copies. When the film became a phenomenon sales went through the roof, with multiple printings, and sales in excess of 70,000 copies. Brian Bendis' semi-autobiographical account of his experiences in Hollywood, **Fortune And Glory**, also drew a lot of attention to Oni.

Oni has a knack of sniffing out talent, and one of its next finds was Greg Rucka, award-winning crime novelist. His first series, **Whiteout**, and follow-up, **Whiteout: Melt** helped to put him and Oni firmly on the map. Today, there are few major publishers who aren't currently employing Rucka on one or more titles, and his spy series **Queen & Country** continues to be one of Oni's most successful titles.

Oni grew, but not without setbacks. There was a period where titles began to slip in the schedules, most notably Kevin Smith's **Jay & Silent Bob** and Jim Mahfood's **Grrl Scouts**. Around the same time, Oni co-founder Bob Schreck was given an offer he could not refuse by DC, who had been eying him for some years and, after seeing what he had done with Oni, were prepared to offer him a Senior Editor role. It was not an easy decision, but go he did, and Joe Nozemack became sole publisher of the company, with Jamie Rich stepping up to the position of Editor-In-Chief and James Lucas Jones coming in as associate editor. Moving premises to new offices, Rich's first priority was to get on top of the late-shipping books.

Another blow came when Kevin Smith took his ball home, moving his *Clerks*-related titles over to Image. It was nothing personal, but his relationship was mostly with Schreck, and with him gone he felt less comfortable at Oni. But Oni weathered the storm, building a solid base of returning series like Chynna Clugston-Major's **Blue Monday**, Jen Van Meter's **Hopeless Savages**, Dan Brereton's **The Nocturnals**, Mike Allred's **Madman** and Guy Davis's **The Marquis**, and a host of one-shots and miniseries including Andi Watson's **Breakfast After Noon** and Paul Dini's **Jingle Belle**. Their collected edition program is exemplary, but possibly hinders their comic sales, as people wait for the trade edition.

Our coverage of Oni over the next two issues is intended to get to the heart of this distinctive publisher, via an in-depth interview with Editor-In-Chief, Jamie S. Rich, and chats with a host of Oni's finest. Now read on…

THE JAMIE RICH INTERVIEW

JAMIE S. RICH started in the comics industry as a regular and intelligent letter contributor, most notably in the letter columns of Comico's Grendel where his thoughtful contributions later led to him being offered an apprenticeship in Dark Horse's editorial department, under the guidance of Diana Schutz and Bob Schreck. Following Schreck over to his newly created Oni Press, Rich started as a consulting editor before rising to his current position of Editor-in-Chief. Borderline's Andrew Cheverton conducted an email interview with Jamie Rich following the editor's visit to the UK for the Comics 2002 convention in Bristol.

Borderline: My first "record" of you is a letter in Grendel # 6. What sort of a comic fan were you back then?
Jamie S. Rich: I was a pretty lucky kid. I was born in 1972, and I started reading comics in 1982 or thereabouts. I started off like anyone else at the time and bought G.I.Joe and moved into Spider-Man. But then a lot of other extremely influential and amazing stuff started to catch my attention. Longshot, Dark Knight, Watchmen... Maus came out when I was in 9th grade [in school], and when I read the preview of Grendel in CBG when I was 15, I was hooked. It started me really getting into independents and really getting into the art of comics. My favourite people were Dave Stevens, Art Adams, and the Pander Bros. I followed Matt Wagner wherever he went. It was also when Eclipse was doing manga, and then Marvel's Akira, First's Lone Wolf & Cub, and then the early days of Viz [Communications]. I worked for my dad doing construction on weekends, starting when I was about 11 or 12, working for $1 an hour, and he kept a running account, and particularly on school vacations I'd work a lot and I'd get huge amounts of credit from him. He'd take me to the comics shop every two weeks and I'd be able to buy whatever I wanted. So, I really explored and read a little of everything.

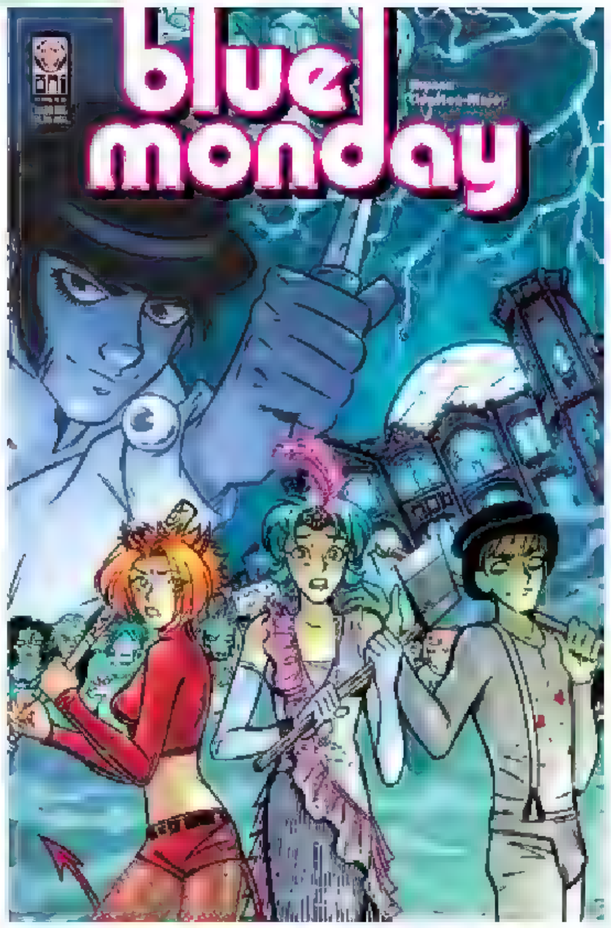
BL: So were you working and/or at college when you started getting into the fandom aspect of the industry, and what had you planned on doing as a career?
JSR: Nah, I was in high school when I started to go to cons and really write letters and made the initial contacts in the field. I actually wasn't reading many comics in college. Somewhere around age 16 I discovered literature and dove into that pretty heavy. I was studying Creative Writing at University, and eventually dropped out. I was lucky that Diana Schutz dropped a job into my lap, because I was doing phone surveys eight hours a day and feeling miserable.

BL: What exactly was it like having Di Schutz give you a job like that? What did you do and, more importantly, what did you learn?
JSR: It was a relief to be honest. Little did I know that I would still spend eight hours a day on the phone! [*laughs*] To be honest, nothing really sank in until I really started working on Grendel with her, and some of the earliest stuff was the initial Darko Macan/Edvin Biukovic series Grendel Tales: Devils & Deaths. It was an instant feeling of, "I am here for something; I am part of a book that is important." But to be honest, I just wanted a decent job. Comics weren't necessarily what I had been planning on, and there wasn't as much geekery over it as one might expect. Which is likely part of what got me the gig. You meet these people that are so hungry to work in comics, and it's like their eagerness also works against them. Diana needed someone that, if Matt Wagner called on the phone, he wouldn't stain his pants. Or, at least, if I stained my pants, I had the good sense to keep my mouth shut about it and just go wash up quietly. [*laughs again - a pretentious thing to do in an e-mail interview!*]

I learned a lot from Diana about the mechanics of making comics. I learned a lot about how to treat creators. And perhaps most important of all, she taught me how not to give all of myself to a company or a creator or a product to the detriment of myself. Like how she used to kick me out of the office if she saw me working overtime. She gave me the ability to hang onto my personal life and not let the job overtake me. One can't be at their job 24 hours a day, comics or no.

BL: Was working with Di (and Dark Horse in general) a good training ground for coming into Oni Press at such an early stage, and what was it about Oni that made such a move attractive to you?
JSR: Well, it's probably important to note that I started my assistant career as Di's bitch, and then became Bob Schreck's bitch. It was the perfect comics editing education. On one hand, I got a really strong grasp of a lot of the technical sides of editing, how to really dig into a book and make sure it comes out right. With Bob, it was a total freewheeling experience. We did more of what I like to call "seat of the pants editing". We do a lot of that at Oni, where you are just running and trying to keep up. But both of them had the same approach to treating creators with the proper importance, and that has been the best thing.

When Bob left Dark Horse, that was when I really started striking out on my own. I had already been doing Usagi Yojimbo, but now I was solo on Dark Horse Presents, I was editing Mike Allred, etc. But the same reasons Bob left were also weighing on me. Dark Horse just wasn't a place for us anymore. And that's no detriment to them, as they are a great company and I like the staff over there. It's just that they were doing things I had no interest in. Oni was the sort of place I wanted to be,



organize them for selling, and it's like, "Christ, did we do all that?" And for me, it's always trying to stay one step ahead and look at what is going out next week.

BL: On that note, what do you have coming out in the future that you can tell us about?
JSR: Man, I always hate these questions, because it's like a laundry list. We have so much stuff; it's impossible to answer easily. It's a big Fall, ranging from neo-noir horror (One Plus One by Neal Shaffer & Daniel Krall) to comedy/romance (Three Days in Europe by Antony Johnston & Mike Hawthorne), criminal teen angst (Kissing Chaos: Non-Stop Beauty by Arthur Dela Cruz) to whacky teen hijinx (Blue Monday: Dead Man's Party by Chynna Clugston-Major). There's more Queen & Country, in both comics and trade form, and trades of [Ted Naifeh's] Courtney Crumrin, [Paul Dini's] Jingle Belle, Atomic City Tales II, and some [of Dan Brereton's] Nocturnals one-shots, which will be collected in Unhallowed Eve.

BL: There's a few new names in that list: where do you find all this new talent, and is that a rewarding part of the job?
JSR: Hmmm... you know, I know I am supposed to, but honestly, I don't think about that stuff all that much. I've said before, in other places, that I think when you start thinking about the quality of your work, or your standing in the industry, or whatnot, you sort of lose sight of your ultimate goal, of what's important. I mean, for me, I am looking at what is due to go into FedEx by the end of the day.

The way I think of it, I have opportunities I can offer. If you're an artist, you need these opportunities. But, at the same time, my opportunities are worthless without quality talent. You need me for the opportunity; my opportunity needs you to be valuable. So, to me, the concept of a rock star editor or publisher is a bit off the mark. It's a mutually beneficial relationship. You know, you could argue there would be no Blue Monday without me, but would I be held in the same regard without Blue Monday?

That said, yeah, it can be quite a thrill to see someone really blossom over the course of a series. Just five minutes ago, I opened a package from Brian Hurtt with the last 14 pages of Skinwalker #4, and it's astounding. He's not the same artist that drew Queen & Country #5 last Fall. He's changed. We were just at Wizard World, and I asked him, "How does it feel that last year you were on the other side of the table showing me Queen & Country samples, and this year you have five published comics?" It was pretty weird.

BL: Oni has, since its inception, brought a lot of new creators into the comic field: is it a lot of sample viewing or do you deliberately try to introduce people from other media?
JSR: It's never been a conscious move. It's largely just been we felt the projects were right, we thought it would be good for us to do. We have turned down projects by people who have reputations in other media because we didn't think it would be good comics. Good comics are the bottom line.

BL: What, as much as you can condense it, is your definition of a good comic; what aspects are you looking to put together in an Oni comic?
JSR: Well, that's the x-factor, isn't it? I can't honestly put my finger on what makes a comic good or even "for Oni." It's like censors and porn - I know it when I see it. [*laughs*] Honestly, it boils down to the simplest equation: good writing + good art = good storytelling. In there I want to see strong characters, and just something I can care about. Or, I want to see that this is a book the artist cares about. I mean, you look at a lot of comics out there - a lot of work-for-hire comics - and you can tell the guys are just phoning it in, cashing a check. I read some mainstream superhero books last night, stuff that came in some comps, and I was just like, "Why?" One of the issues was a tale where the hero goes back to his roots and back to the scene of the catalyst that made him this guy in a pervert suit - and I flipped the book over to see what was up. Wasn't a fill-in issue, it was the regular monthly team. Wasn't a milestone issue. And this was a character that has other titles, and this book didn't fit in anywhere with the other books that have been coming out. I just couldn't see the whole point. And the saddest thing of all? *Really* talented guys working on the book. Guys whose stuff I'd read on my own if it wasn't given to me.

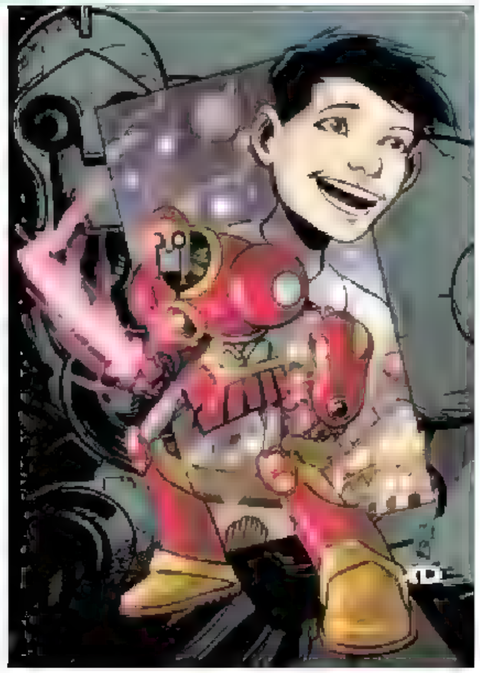
I mean, more power to them if this is what they want, but I can't help but feel the credits of the movie are over, and most of us are sitting in the theatre because we haven't realised it's time to go home... and buy better comics.

BL: On the subject of the superheroes: are you following or enjoying Marvel's current crop, particularly those from Oni creators? Or do you find the mainstream's reliance on those comics to be too much of a retrograde step?
JSR: I would think it was a retrograde step if they were abandoning all other projects as non-Marvel. I mean, I can't begrudge them the desire to work on those properties, or the desire for a better paying gig. That would be silly. Plus, I like a lot of it. I

and when they opened the doors, it was clear between myself and Bob and Joe Nozemack that it was just a matter of time. And the timing was perfect, because I got to stick around and see Usagi Yojimbo: Grasscutter and Red Rocket 7 to their completion - still two books I am amazingly proud of.

And why is Oni attractive? Coz we do whatever the fuck we want! [*laughs*]

BL: There's a lot of evidence of that with a diverse range of books on your lists. How satisfying is it to sit back and look at what may be the best back catalogue in the industry?
JSR: Well, you're asking me to look at the stuff in a way I don't think it's my place to look at it. If we ever look back, it's usually at a con where we lay all the trades out on a table to



love Daredevil; I think it's the best mainstream monthly serial out there. I am a huge Peter Milligan fan, and to see him work with Allred on X-Statix is a thrill. Gail Simone's Deadpool is deadly funny. And did you read that Rucka Elektra/Wolverine novel? It was excellent.

I think the more unfortunate element of what is going on at Marvel is that we are definitely seeing their positive growth affect the lower ends of the sales chart negatively. It sort of speaks to a lot of the complaints that have been levied at some of the retail community over the years. Now, of course, as always, we have to be clear that there are a ton of amazing retailers out there who really make this industry thrive, but we also have to keep in mind that probably a huge amount of the others are not necessarily friendly to anything but the big boys. And it's that level that I think looks at this boom and only chases the boom. It's just going back to the early '90s speculation, and not building a retail base. It's like, in the early '90s, if a record store owner sold 50 copies of *Nevermind*, he ordered 20 more and 5 Pixies records and tried to sell the Pixies records to the people buying *Nevermind*, to expand his base. Same thing now. You have a good store like Atlantis Fantasyworld in California, and they're going to push a Madman collection on someone buying X-Statix, or Big Planet back East are going to get the folks buying Elektra to give Queen & Country a shot. Get them reading more - diversify. We need more of that.

BL: You don't think that, despite a retailer's best intentions, there's too much fan resistance to that, though? The Queen & Country reader that thinks Elektra is superhero trash, and the Elektra fan that thinks Queen & Country is trash because it isn't superheroes? Where, in fact, the similarities - aside from the author - are remarkable, and the irony is that Marvel's comics now are less about superheroes than they ever were.

JSR: Well, sure, I am not naive enough to think every Elektra reader will enjoy Queen & Country - hence the music analogy had a disproportionate number of Pixies to Nirvana. The good storeowners pick up on their customers' habits, though, and know which ones to push. Speaking of Atlantis, again: Maryanne Huntzinger could sell bacon to a pig. She knows how to work her customers. I would wager she sold more copies of Cut My Hair, for instance, than any retailer in the world. Joe Ferrara, who owns the store, actually once said, "If I like something, we order 5 copies, and if she likes it, we sell 50." *That's* what I mean. *That's* what we need more of.

And we need more on the publishing end, too. Don't get me wrong; marketing is a big, big issue in our industry - how does it work, how can we do it, etc? So I am not isolating retailers. Just somehow we got there.

And, as you say, Marvel is moving away from superheroes a little bit. DC has done it. I always say we don't penetrate the mass market mainstream very well because we keep trying to sell them Spider-Man, when we should be selling them Alias, or 100 Bullets, or whatever. We're an industry chasing our own tails, and while I don't think superheroes should be ushered into extinction, maybe it's time the idea that they are the main facet of our art is.

BL: I do take your point - I once gave away 25 copies of The Maxx # 4 (which Image fans had stopped buying) to Vertigo readers and the indy crowd. Within a month we had 16 standing orders for The Maxx and not one back issue left. But to have to give away stock to do so - to overcome a prejudice like that - isn't always feasible. How, as a company largely devoid of superheroes, do you market and place your books to people, both inside and outside the comic readership?

JSR: That's sort of the Holy Grail, figuring out how to get to the people outside the comics industry. You do what you can, try to get mainstream press, that sort of thing. Otherwise, we use a lot of online comics venues, stuff on our own website people could sample. Really, we just push the product as good comics.

***NEXT MONTH**: Oni Overload continues with the second part of the Jamie Rich interview, where Jamie and Chev discuss Audrey Hepburn, adaptations of Oni material and that old favourite, the future of comics. To miss it would be a very bad thing.*

Oni Press – The Creators Have Their Say Part 1

HOW do you set about the task of running an interesting and informative magazine feature about an entire publishing company and its output? Of course you go to the company and talk to the people who run it – and as you've read the first part of a massive interview with Oni Press' Editor In Chief Jamie Rich just previously in these pages – but then what do you do? Line up a features writer to put together an article about the publisher's output? That's an option, and often a good one, but it'll tend to give you an outsider's viewpoint no matter how well informed the features writer may be – and sometimes it's nice to get a feel for a

wide-ranging body of creative work from an insider's point of view.

So, instead of sitting down to write a long piece about his impressions of Oni Press, Borderline's intrepid Jay Eales approached a couple of dozen of the creators who work with Oni and asked each of them fundamentally the same questions about their work and their impressions of the company. As you'll see in this first instalment of the results, he came up with a set of responses which ranged all the way from a blank silence through reticent and laconic to loquacious. We believe it all adds up to as broad, yet as personal, a view of a single publisher's style, aims and output as you'll find anywhere!

The starting point for this conversational feature had to be Oni Press' co-founder Bob Schreck...

BOB SCHRECK

Borderline: Basically, I'd like to get a feel for what Oni was like in the beginning...
Bob Schreck: It was exciting, scary and fun. Kinda like riding on a roller coaster that you knew from the start wasn't fully completed, yet somehow having the faith that you'd never run out of new track to ride on. Joe and I were great working partners. No drama, except for the shoulder-to-shoulder excitement of what each new day would bring.

BL: ...your involvement in its birth and what you feel were your main achievements there...
BS: Oni was Joe Nozemack and myself. We started it. We wanted to make really good comics that were aesthetically and commercially sound. I think we did it.

BL: ...also, your feelings when you were invited to go to DC.
BS: DC had been attempting to bring me on board since 1990ish. I was flattered and nervous and torn.

BL: Did you achieve all that you set out to do at Oni?
BS: I definitely feel that my time and energy with Oni was well spent and I believe I met all the goals I had set within the time that I was there.

BL: Was it an easy decision to make?
BS: One of the most difficult of my career. Not one made lightly. Lots of consultation with family, friends, peers and peer-friends.

BL: How smooth was the transition period?
BS: Perfect. Joe and Jamie and I worked it all out like adults. Super-smooth.

BL: I think it would also be interesting to compare a working day for you at Oni with the equivalent in your new role at DC.
BS: Well, the commute is certainly different. Certain concerns I had at Oni are not at issue at DC, and vice-versa, but the actual work is essentially the same. I make comic books.

BL: Do you have any convention stories or scurrilous tales that you could share?
BS: I reserve those for more intimate conversations.

BL: What do you think about Oni as they are today?
BS: They are putting out some of the best comics on the racks. Joe, Jamie and James each have very keen sets of eyes and a real passion for the medium. They continue to find powerful new voices and bring them to fruition in innovative packages. Just look at last year's award nominations. Look at the consistently great reviews their line gets.

BL: What would you say are their biggest achievements?
BS: Too many to list. I love what they're doing!

GAIL SIMONE

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Gail Simone: Lea (Rumble Girls, Cathedral Child) Hernandez asked me to write something for her, and we spoke first to James at Oni. And Oni's unbeatable as a publisher of indie titles, I think. No one else is producing this much quality work with such variety.

BL: What's the best thing about working with Jamie, James and Joe?
GS: They take every book as seriously as the creators. They offer friendship, support, guidance, and cajoling when necessary. And they're completely worthy of your full trust.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
GS: Yes. I went the entire convention at SDCC (San Diego 2002) without being able to try one of those fabled Krispy Kreme donuts. As for Oni anecdotes, not really... We barely got to speak, the booth was so busy.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
GS: Killer Princesses, the story of three deadly but not bright assassins. Issue three was long delayed from Lea for personal and work reasons, but is nearing completion, and it's her best work ever. Big Snobby Git, a loving mockery of Brit/Yank relations. And we're currently working on a suspense story called Kink.

Other publishers: lots of Simpsons work for Bongo Comics, Agent X for Marvel, and many things that are yet top secret for DC and Marvel.

BL: Can you describe Killer Princesses for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
GS: Killer Princesses is an indictment of several media and political trends that indicate a tolerance level for bullshit on behalf of the public at large. It's funny, but in a slightly awful way. The girls are everything we should loathe, and yet, I can't help it, I really love them.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
GS: Get up early, write for an hour or two and answer email, go to work (I'm a hairdresser, for real) come home, kiss my hubby, and write a bunch more. I don't watch TV, I just work a lot.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
GS: Right now, Skinwalker. This is a great series, with every step placed just right. And Courtney Crumrin is also a fave. And Hopeless Savages. Dang it. That's more than one, isn't it?

ARTHUR DELA CRUZ

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Arthur Dela Cruz: I began as a cover colorist, doing the odd cover for books like Alison Dare, Barry Ween. Then when the time was right, I gave them a mini-comic of Kissing Chaos, which they seemed to like, which led to the series.

BL: What's the best thing about working with Jamie, Joe and James?
ADC: I would have to say how personal it feels. It's not like I'm working for some faceless corporation, or some kind of committee. It's like working with your friends.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
ADC: I wish. I'm usually quiet, and I sit back and observe everything. This usually makes me the butt of all Jamie's jokes and insults. It's all in good fun though, or so Jamie says.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
ADC: Hmm, well besides numerous covers, (I couldn't even name them all!) and Kissing Chaos, there's Skinwalker, which I've just finished. I'm busy with the second Kissing Chaos series right now [*Non-Stop Beauty*]. As for upcoming comic book projects, I've pitched different things to Oni and other companies, and I'm just playing the waiting game right now.

BL: Can you describe Kissing Chaos for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
ADC: Kissing Chaos is really a mix of a whole bunch of different things. The plots range from love stories and teen angst, to crime fiction, and a surreal mix of all of the above. I've always found it hard to describe, because there are so many elements that make up the series. Over the past year, the series has acquired a wide range of hardcore fans, and I'm sure each one of them has a different reason for digging the series. The new series starting in October will feature new characters, but will contain all the same elements of the original series. This will be an ideal jumping on point for people who've never read the book. Also the trade paperback was due in stores in mid-September, so it will be easy for new readers to catch up.

BL: I understand that you had a secret agenda with the first series of Kissing Chaos, which you sprang on the editors at the last minute, when it was too late to change their minds. Is that right? What was that all about?
ADC: Well, it wasn't a big plan or anything; I just left out certain elements of the series when I pitched the initial story. And when these elements began to surface in the actual comic, I caught the Oni guys off guard. It's not something I would recommend, but luckily the Kissing Chaos [debut] did well enough so Oni didn't mind publishing a follow-up series. But Kissing Chaos is very near and dear to my heart, and if Oni ever wanted to stop publishing it, I would still find a way to get the book out to the fans. Thankfully Oni seems to be pleased with the series thus far, so it's all good.

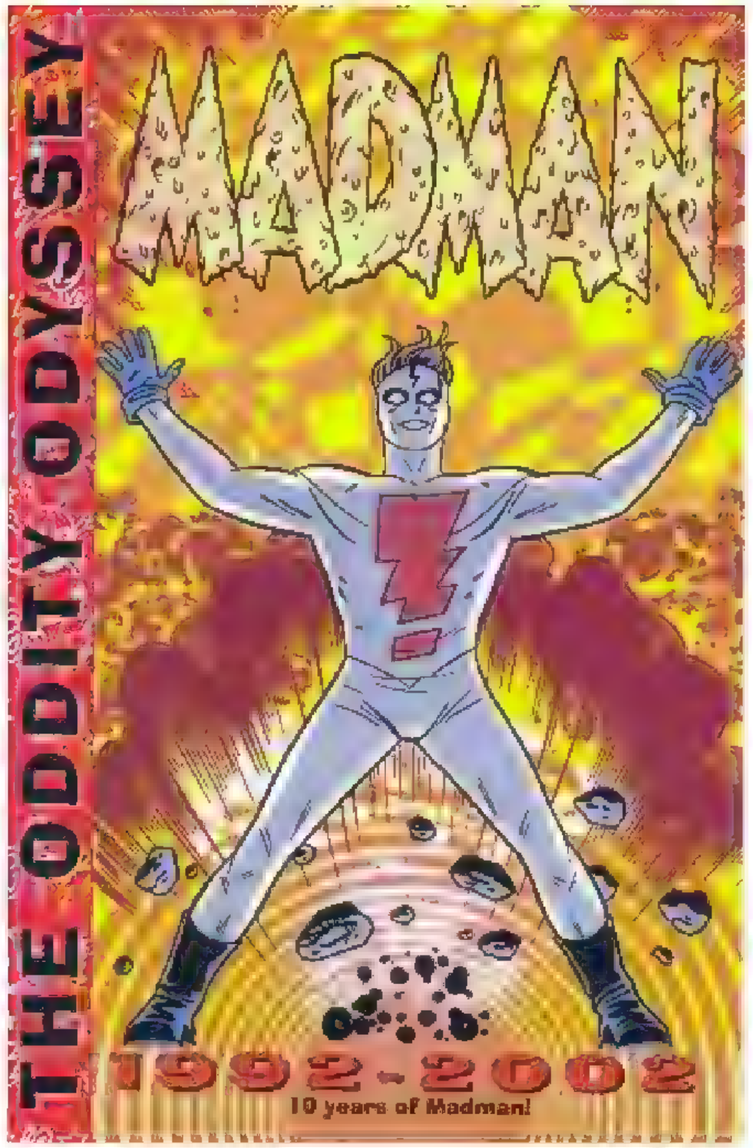
BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
ADC: I usually work all night, and sleep in the morning. I don't have a fixed schedule that I work, but I always get a full day of work completed, whether it be 10 hours in a row, or spread out during the course of a day.

BL: If you had to recommend just one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
ADC: Well, my first experience with Oni Press was Oni Double Feature. I loved that stuff. Lately, I really dig Shot Callerz, mainly because I really dig Weldele's art, and Phillips' writing is very real.

MIKE ALLRED

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Mike Allred: They're all our friends. And Jamie (and Bob Schreck) edited me at Dark Horse.

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
MA: Well, don't work there. Play there once in a while. Don't work there.



BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
MA: No. Just the redundant one about Jamie, Joe and James slathering naked together on the floor at a Baltimore show. But everyone's already heard that one.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
MA: Not *for - with*. Jeez! Most recently, Spaceman and the annual Color Special cover. Next is a Mr. Gum one-shot with J. Bone.

BL: Can you describe your Oni work for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
MA: It's pretty cool.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
MA: Cereal, TV, draw a little, watch a couple DVDs. Bike to the movies. Hang out on a street corner for a few hours until I find a place to crash. Crash. Get up and start over again.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
MA: What do they publish? I like Bone a lot.

TED NAIFEH

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Ted Naifeh: They have a good reputation for producing high quality independent comics, so they were on the list when I was sending out proposals for my creator-owned material. I'd submitted a project to them called EVA: Iron Kitten, and they liked it, though they had too many similar projects at the time. But they encouraged me to submit other things, so I sent them a project called Courtney Crumrin and the Night Things. They called me back the next day and said they wanted to publish it.

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
TN: They're extremely encouraging. They know how to keep the talent happy. I've never felt as valued by a publisher as I do with them. And for a creator with as delicate an ego as mine, that's important.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
TN: Sort of. This year at Chicago we were all having dinner. It was the end of the convention and we were indulging in some much-needed drinks. I was rooming with Brian Hurtt, and he was talking drunkenly about this notebook he'd been bringing everywhere to take down important convention notes, contact info, etc. He was really proud of himself for bringing it and using it, being all responsible and business-like. That's a big deal for us overgrown geeks. Anyway, at the end of the meal, he forgot it at the table. I snatched it and hid it under my coat as we walked back to the hotel. When we got back to the room, I tucked it into his collection of free stuff from the con. Never mentioned it. I kept trying to think of some clever way to bring it up, but couldn't. Later that evening over more drinks, he realized that he'd forgotten it at the restaurant. We all sniggered at him under our breath, but let it go. He probably found it in his stuff and is still scratching his head over it. Maybe he'll read this and go "Oooooohh!!! That's how that happened." Pretty lame as practical jokes go, I guess. I should have mentioned it halfway back from the restaurant and let him run back to get it, not find it, get all puzzled and angry and then present it once he'd caught up with us again. But I'm way too nice for that.

On the other hand, Joe and Jamie are ruthless. After the convention in Florida, we were waiting for our flights in the airport, and decided to call James and see how he was doing alone at the office. So Joe calls and asks if he's heard from Jamie, claiming that Jamie hadn't come home the night before. A few minutes later, Jamie calls, saying he's at the gate waiting for Joe, who hasn't shown yet. He tells James to call Joe, and then takes Joe's phone. James calls, Jamie answers, and starts to get really confused. Five more minutes of this and James is really starting to question his sanity. Joe and Jamie are just giggling like schoolgirls, if you can imagine that. I made it clear that if they tried that crap on me, lawsuit.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
TN: I currently have the new Courtney Crumrin series coming from Oni in December, and next summer they want to publish EVA: Iron Kitten after all. I'm also working on a series with NBM Publishing called How Loathsome, that's due out early next year. It's quite different from Courtney, being an adults' only title, and deals with various underground subcultures in San Francisco. I'm working on that with a writing partner, Tristan Crane.

BL: Can you describe Courtney Crumrin for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
TN: Well, Courtney Crumrin is basically an all ages comic about a little girl who lives in a spooky old house full of creepy little creatures called Night Things. Over the course of the series she has to deal with her rich, snotty classmates, her materialistic, yuppie parents, and a goblin that lives in the nearby forest and eats children, among other things.

I wanted to write a series that reflects my own feelings about childhood, so I decided to make the main character a rather dark, grim little kid; not so much an icon of sweetness with a perfect moral compass the way Harry Potter is and Roald Dahl characters tend to be, but more a product of her environment, scars and all. She's sullen and withdrawn, and takes bitter revenge against those who antagonize her. She's the sort of children's book character I can relate to. I'm awfully proud of the series.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
TN: I pretty much get up around 10:00 or 11:00 am, make a bowl of cereal, sit down at my work desk, answer email, and start drawing. I take a break for dinner to hang out with my girlfriend for a little while, somewhere around 7:00-7:30, and then get back to work around 9:00, and push on through till around 1:00 am. Glamorous, no? I gotta look into a different line of work.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
TN: Well, that would be Courtney Crumrin, because I get more royalties that way. But if royalties weren't an issue? It's a tough choice. Oni puts out lots of good books. Hopeless Savages, I think. It just puts a smile on my face whenever I read it.

Or Barry Ween. That's some funny stuff.

BUT MORE ALARMING BY FAR WAS THE SOUND OF SOMETHING STIRRING AT THE FOOT OF HER BED.
WHO'S THERE?!
AT FIRST SHE COULDN'T REMEMBER WHERE SHE WAS.
BUT AS WAKEFULNESS TOOK HOLD, A SINGLE STRAY DREAM SEEMED TO REMAIN.
CONFUSED THOUGHTS STRUGGLED IN HER SLEEPY MIND TO EXPLAIN WHAT SHE WAS SEEING.
IT WASN'T TILL SHE HAD THE LIGHT ON THAT ICEY PANIC BEGAN TO TAKE HOLD.
HUH ...
NEEDLESS TO SAY, SHE DIDN'T CLOSE HER EYES AGAIN ALL NIGHT. WORLD YOU?

DAN BRERETON

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Dan Brereton: I had known Bob Schreck for years, and when Oni started publishing in the late Nineties, I told Bob that I wanted them to be the ones to collect The Nocturnals. Bob and Joe liked the idea and we made it happen. From that point on, I felt Nocturnals had a home.

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
DB: I don't actually work there, I work at home, but I enjoy working with Oni Press on projects, and I enjoy spending time with them at shows - sitting on panels, going to parties. Jamie, Joe and James are extremely energetic, creative and proactive publishers - I love working with them - their enthusiasm is infectious and they care about the business of publishing good comics. Jamie can be a curmudgeon at times, but I've always said that curmudgeonry is important to good editing.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
DB: I remember when my Buffy editor Jamie Rich was talking to Joe and Bob at the Oni booth one year at San Diego, when Jamie was still with Dark Horse. I said "You know, you guys really need to hire Jamie to work for you guys." They all got really quiet and looked at each other for a second. Then one of them turned to me and said " Shhhhh...." About a month later, Jamie had left Dark Horse and was working for Oni. I was very pleased.

I also remember sitting in a major producer's house in the Hollywood hills ready to pitch Nocturnals - we'd been invited there and told by the big studio this producer had already been briefed on what the comic was about. When we got there and started discussing Nocturnals as a film project, we quickly realized he had no clue what we were talking about and that we'd been misinformed. It was very nearly a total fiasco, but Joe saved the meeting with some fast talking. The producer eventually passed, but I felt Joe pulled an embarrassing meeting back from the edge of disaster.

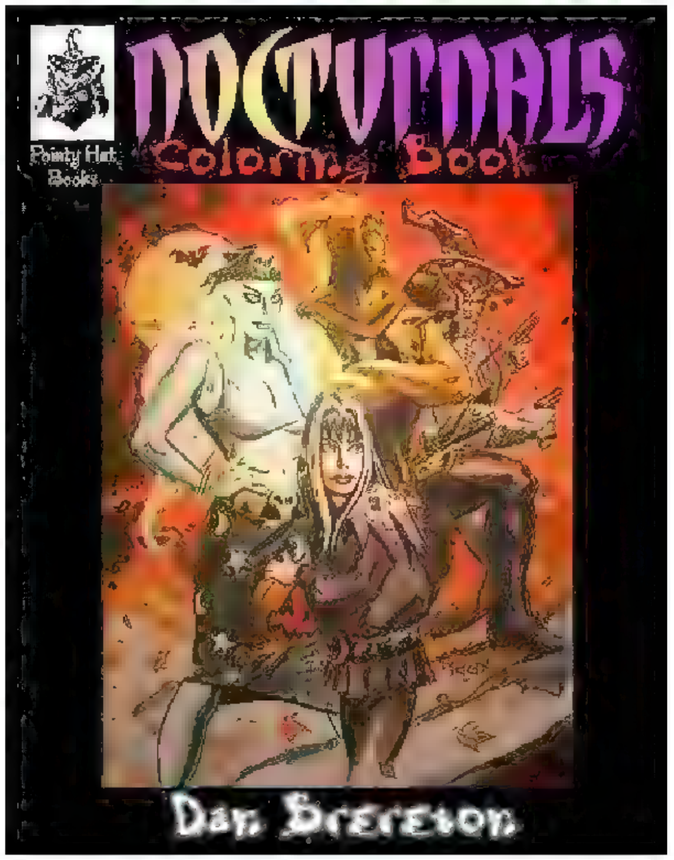
BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
DB: Since Oni published the first trade, Nocturnals: Black Planet, they've followed it up with another Nocturnals miniseries, *The Dark Forever*, and a Nocturnals spin-off called The Gunwitch: Outskirts of Doom, both of which have been collected as trade paperbacks.

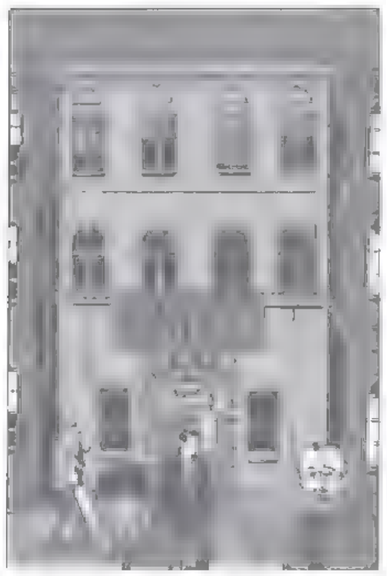
In September, Nocturnals: Unhallowed Eve hit the shelves. It collects two Nocturnals Halloween specials: the hard-to-find Witching Hour and the comic star-studded 48 page Halloween spooktacular Troll Bridge. Both feature Halloween Girl in a pair of humorous and spooky adventures.

BL: Can you describe The Nocturnals for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
DB: Fans of the Nocturnals range from Oscar-winning *Pulp Fiction* screenwriter Roger Avary, to WWF wrestling legend Edge, comics master Alex Ross and rock n' roll horror-meister Rob Zombie. There's something for everyone in the books. I feel the stories contain my best work as a writer and an illustrator. The Nocturnals are best described as " Monster Noir", spooky heroes with guns, a mix of the pulp styles of the horror themes of H.P. Lovecraft and crime fiction of Raymond Chandler. The blend is a smooth one, topped off with a healthy dose of Halloween and lots of hard-boiled action. I've never let a reader down yet with the books.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
DB: I've always been a night owl. I wake up in the afternoon around the time my kids are getting home from school, and after they've been tucked in that night, I turn on taped Howard Stern radio programs and go to work until the birds start chirping and the sun starts to show its face.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
DB: I'm partial to the works of Jay Stephens, his work consistently entertains and inspires me. Oni has several of his books in print to choose from.





DANIEL KRALL

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Daniel Krall: I was formerly a freelance illustrator, working mostly for fashion and entertainment magazines. Jobs got kind of thin and I saw it as a great opportunity to concentrate on trying to get work in comics. Neal Shaffer (the writer of One Plus One) and I worked out a few pitches, and went to the San Diego Comicon in 2001. We met the Oni guys there, and they were very receptive.

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
DK: They really seem to have the creators' best interests in mind.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
DK: Neal and I have only been to a handful of conventions so far. There was this one time where Neal called a group of Klingons, Vulcans. They were pissed, so that was pretty funny.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
DK: I'm currently working on One Plus One. I have a few projects on the burner, but they're a little up in the air. I think I'll keep them under wraps for the time being.

BL: Can you describe One Plus One as an introduction for our readers?
DK: One Plus One is a noir-ish horror mystery. It's got a Hitchcock/ Lynch kind of a vibe about it.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
DK: I usually get down to business around mid-morning. I listen to music and draw till I get hungry. Then I eat. Then I repeat the process till I either get hungry again or fall asleep. This is all intermixed with a good dose of screwing around. All kidding aside, when I'm on track I really end up busting ass.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
DK: It's hard to say 'cause Oni publishes such a wide range of books, and I like a lot of them. My favorite right now is Blue Monday. It's like dirty Archie, and you can't beat that, right?

PAUL DINI

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Paul Dini: Kevin Smith suggested I give them a heads up when I was looking to publish my Jingle Belle comic. I met with Bob Schreck, Jamie Rich and Joe Nozemack, liked them a lot, and before I knew it, we were up and rolling.

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
PD: Great support people and the encouragement to let your imagination run wild.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
PD: At one recent San Diego con, editor Jamie Rich and I watched some fellow in full Elfquest get-up come over to the table, pick up a copy of Jingle Belle, which had just come out a few months before, dubiously leaf through it, put it back, then a couple minutes later, pick it up, leaf through it again and put it back again. He did this a few more times and the expression on the guy's face was like, "Well, it says she's an elf, but I don't know..." I kept muttering rude things to Jamie like: "Yo, Skywise, toss down some dreamberries already and just buy the damn book, okay?" That probably cost us a sale, but it was funny.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
PD: I'm currently finishing the scripts for Mutant, Texas #4 and a new Jingle Belle issue for this year.

BL: Can you describe your Oni work for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
PD: Mutant, Texas is about a very strange little town in West Texas that is a nexus for mystic, nuclear and cosmic energy. As a result, most of the people, plants and animals there have mutated into rather unique lifeforms. The series is built around a rowdy young cowgirl named Ida Red who displays amazing science and mystic-based powers and goes on to become the town's sheriff and local super-heroine. She's aided by such diverse creatures as a comical armadillo sidekick, a handsome cactus cowboy and his always-complaining horse, a wise old bear-woman and a savage jaguar that only Ida can tame. It's a playful amalgam of a lot of different western imagery and themes and so far the readers really have enjoyed it.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
PD: Stagger out of bed around 9 AM, email apologies and lame excuses to Jamie as to why the script is late, write until 2 AM, stagger into bed, repeat until published.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
PD: It's hard to pick just one, because they run from spy adventure titles like Queen & Country to all ages friendly books like Magic Pickle. I guess I'd pick Blue Monday as the quintessential Oni book. Very modern in its look and sensibility, sometimes funny, sometimes bittersweet, but always with a well-defined character-driven core.

AND SERVE!
SURPRISE!
See DADDIKINS? SOME OF THE CHOCOLATE MELTS AND OTHER PIECES STAY CHUNKY. I MADE 'EM YUMMY FOR MY DADDUMS TUMMY!
WHY, JINGLE BELLE! HOW SWEET OF YOU!
JINGLE BELLE

MIKE HAWTHORNE

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Mike Hawthorne: Well, I'd been sending my work to Oni for years. Wasn't till Antony Johnston's book, Three Days in Europe, came along that I finally got to work for Oni. James asked if I'd be interested, and I said yes without hesitation.

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
MH: Honestly, and I know this may sound like I'm kissing up, but it's the guys that run the show. James, Jamie, and Joe have been great to me. They offer professional and emotional support exactly when it's needed. Hell, I just got an email yesterday from James telling me how much they all like the pencils to Three Days In Europe #2. They are genuinely nice guys!

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
MH: Well, before Oni, I self published a 4-issue series called Hysteria. Then I did Hysteria shorts for Slave Labor and Radio Comix.

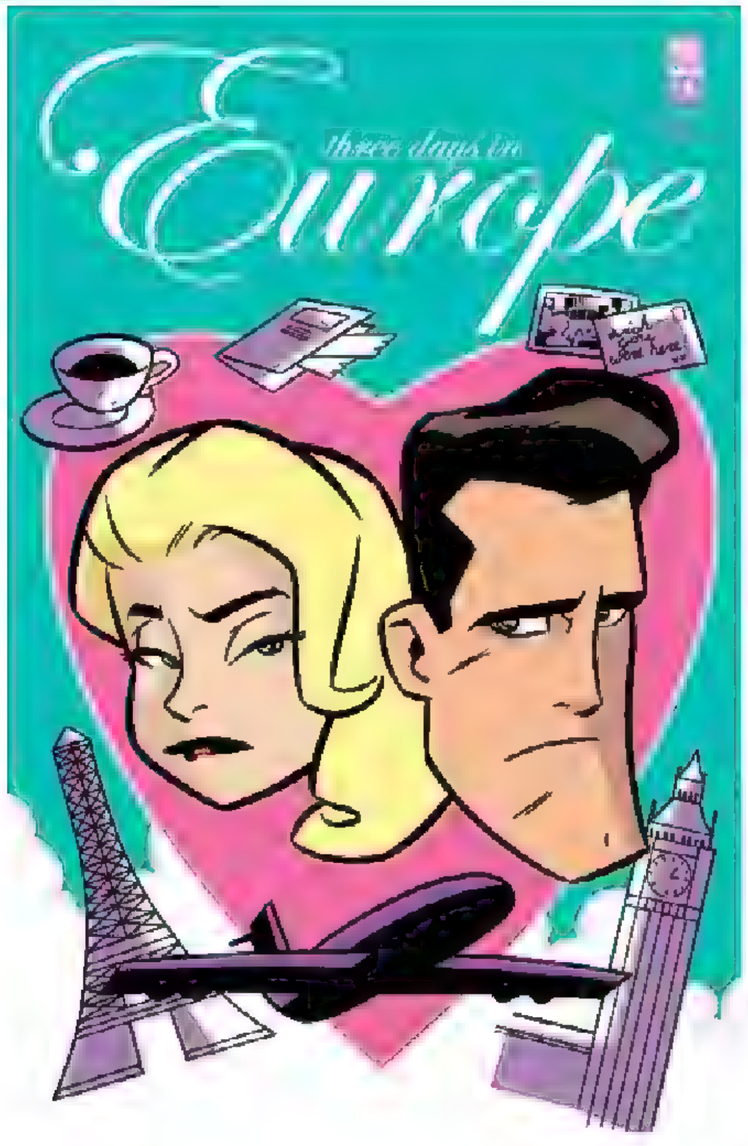
I'm working on several projects right now. I'm doing a book called Umbra with Steve Murphy, a fantastic writer from Mirage Studios. I'm also doing Whiskey Dickell, International Cowgirl, with Mark Ricketts. Mark is a fantastic writer and artist, and I jumped at the opportunity to work with him. He wrote and drew the fantastic Nowheresville for Image *(www.nowheresville.com)*. Our book is being put out by Image also.

After that it's Sparta with my friend J. Torres, which is being published by NBM. It's an historically based book about female gladiators. Then, I have one more book in the works, but that one I can't say too much about. But if all goes well, it could be pretty big!

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
MH: Well, I wake up and take care of family matters. Like caring for my 19 month old daughter, Sophia. Then it's to the studio, where I'll be off and on all day (and night!). My schedule is not fixed. I do manage to work 6 days a week, and finish about 2 to 3 pages a day.

I also teach at a high school for "at risk inner city youth" part time. So that takes me out of the house several days a week.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
MH: Well, I'm a fan of Volcanic Revolver. Queen and Country always looks great. My buddies, Mike Norton and J. Torres have a great book out called Jason and the Argobots.



ANTONY JOHNSTON

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Antony Johnston: Initially, Warren Ellis recommended me to Jamie Rich, as he knew I wanted to work with Oni. After that, it was just a matter of flinging pitches at them until they picked a few...

BL: What's the best thing about working there?
AJ: The feeling of support, and creator freedom. When Oni say "yes" to an idea, they mean it - they'll promote your book as much as possible, and won't interfere with your vision. You can't ask for much more than that.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
AJ: I can tell you that Mike Norton was drawing Jason and the Argobots pages *at his table* during SPX...! The biggest "anecdote" I have, though, is of how much bonding there is between Oni creators at cons - which is to say, a lot. We have a secret handshake and everything.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
AJ: Three Days In Europe, my first book with Oni (drawn by Mike Hawthorne) starts in November. After that I have a contemporary London horror series called Emily Spook, and a more "classic" horror story, Closer, with Mike Norton - which will probably be a graphic novel.

Besides Oni, my children's adventure comic Rosemary's Backpack is out this month from Cyberosia, and I have a couple of major projects in the works with Avatar.

BL: Can you whet our appetite for Three Days In Europe?
AJ: Three Days In Europe is a screwball romantic comedy about two New Yorkers - Jack and Jill - who book one another secret romantic holidays in Europe to try and patch up their relationship. The problem is, both holidays are booked for the same dates... and in different countries. They spend the next three days falling in and out of trouble as they try to catch up with one another with, as they say in Hollywood, hilarious consequences.

BL: Can you describe a typical working day for you?
AJ: I have a day job in London - I'm the Art Editor of a newsstand magazine for a large publisher. I do that from 9 till 6; return home on the train; spend some time with my girlfriend, then write until 2 or 3 in the morning. Repeat for every day of the week, then at weekends I just carry on writing.

BL: If you had to recommend one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
AJ: Probably Whiteout, by Greg Rucka and Steve Lieber. It was the first Oni book I read - a few years back, obviously - and it was Whiteout that first made me think, "I want to publish something with these guys."

CHYNNA CLUGSTON-MAJOR

Borderline: How did you come to be working with Oni Press?
Chynna Clugston-Major: I pestered Jamie for several years before he broke down and admitted how cool I was, that he had to give me my own series or he'd just die. And now he sees I was right, and clearly worships me.

BL: What's the best thing about working with Jamie, Joe and James?
CC-M: The fact that I can joke with them about nearly anything, and that they can dish back insults threefold. They also know how to have a good time in work and play, making them great company, which is pretty damn important to me. I can't work with people who don't have a sense of humor, I'm afraid.

BL: Any anecdotes or convention stories you can share with us?
CC-M: All I can say is, once you do Karaoke with us, you'll never be the same again. Especially if James sings.

BL: What have you done for Oni to date, and what's coming up next, at Oni or other publishers?
CC-M: Hmm - Blue Monday: The Kids Are Alright and Absolute Beginners, BM: Dead Man's Party, Mike Allred's It Girl! one shot, Hopeless Savages flashbacks for the first series, and flashbacks for Hopeless Savages: Ground Zero #3. That's what I've done so far, as well as short stories in the first two Oni Color Specials and Paul Dini's Jingle Belle All-Star Holiday Hullabaloo. Upcoming projects include Scooter Girl, which is a 6-issue self-contained miniseries, another Blue Monday one-shot holiday deal, maybe some more Jingle Belle, and the next full BM series.

BL: Can you describe Blue Monday for any of our readers who have yet to experience it?
CC-M: My typical description is "Archie on crack," but a bit more of an insight (well, that was pretty accurate, actually) would be to say it's what I imagine would have happened if John Hughes (*Sixteen Candles*, *Weird Science*) and Savage Steve Holland (*Better Off Dead*, *One Crazy Summer*) got together and did a comic about a bunch of obnoxious music and sex-obsessed high school kids in California in the early 1990s.

BL: What's a typical working day like for you?
CC-M: Um, I couldn't really answer this question, so I had my roommate, Jenny, answer it for me...
Jenny: Okay, I swear this is just about exactly how it goes down.

She wakes up at like eight, right, because that's when the greatest love of her life goes to work. Then she gets a snack. She brews a pot of Earl Grey tea and grabs some brekkie treat like Cheerios or something. Then she sits at her desk at her laptop, checks out some webpages, answers some mail (swearing to Jamie that she's almost done with her work), chats a bit online, and stares at the wall. At this point, she takes a shower, and spends about 3.4 hours making herself pretty for work. I think she goes through about three Pepsis while she's drying her hair.

And whoa! Isn't it almost time for lunch? So she does some super-deformed cartoons of Jamie taking smack, and works on maybe one panel while staring at the clock, waiting for it to be noon, and thus officially lunch time. Lunch usually

involves some horrid greasy take out and more Pepsi. I really have no idea how that girl stays so thin, because she eats the worst food ever. So while she has her double deep fried fat sammich, she hangs out and watches TV. Old movies, cartoons, whatever. If I'm around, I'll fight for Ming Tsai [*see the Food Network, http://www.foodtv.com/*], but I usually lose. She's a remote control Nazi. She's totally that girl who will walk in while you're watching TV, grab the remote, and change the channel to something *she* wants to watch.
[CC-M: Hey, I ask before I turn the channel! It just doesn't matter what the answer is.]
Jenny: Lunch over? Siesta, siesta!

After the siesta, if it's an inking sort of day, she's got to find a DVD to watch, so she doesn't die of boredom. So she spends another 2.8 hours standing with this horribly blank expression by her collection of roughly 649 DVDs, trying to find something she a) wants to watch, and b) hasn't seen a bazillion times. Usually, we'll come home from work, and she'll still be standing there with this glazed look on her face, trying to find a movie. In which case, we'll try to speed up the process, and make some suggestions, which all get summarily denied with a "naw." I really think this is just a few hours that she spaces out and fantasizes about winning the lottery or something while drinking Pepsi. Maybe winning the Pepsi lottery. I dunno.

But hey hey, it's time to walk Buster! And Buster never wants the "short" walk. He wants the "long" walk, which means he'll likely overheat, and much time has to be spent cooling down the bulldog.

What? We're back? Is it time for dinner! I think it is! Jon and I will cook up something tasty (no bell peppers!) while she works a bit. We'll try to provide an appetizer for her like goat cheese and triscuits to make her stay up there and work instead of zone out in front of the fridge while deciding on a snack (which can last up to dinnertime if we don't keep an eye on her). And more cans of Pepsi. She sometimes works, sometimes just checks her email, ignoring angry "WHERE ARE MY PAGES!" emails from Jamie.

She hangs out and watches TV while eating dinner (as lunch, only with less grease). Got to let that food digest for a bit while watching a movie.

And hey! It's nine p.m.! Time to work!

She works solid for like an hour, hour and a half max. Two Pepsis, minimum. Jon and I are pretty disruptive, and Jon usually gets Buster all riled up. We chant Buster's war cry "GO BUSTER, GO! GO BUSTER, GO!" while Jon chases him around.

And whoa! Ten thirty! Time for bed. Man, she's beat.

Wash, rinse, repeat.

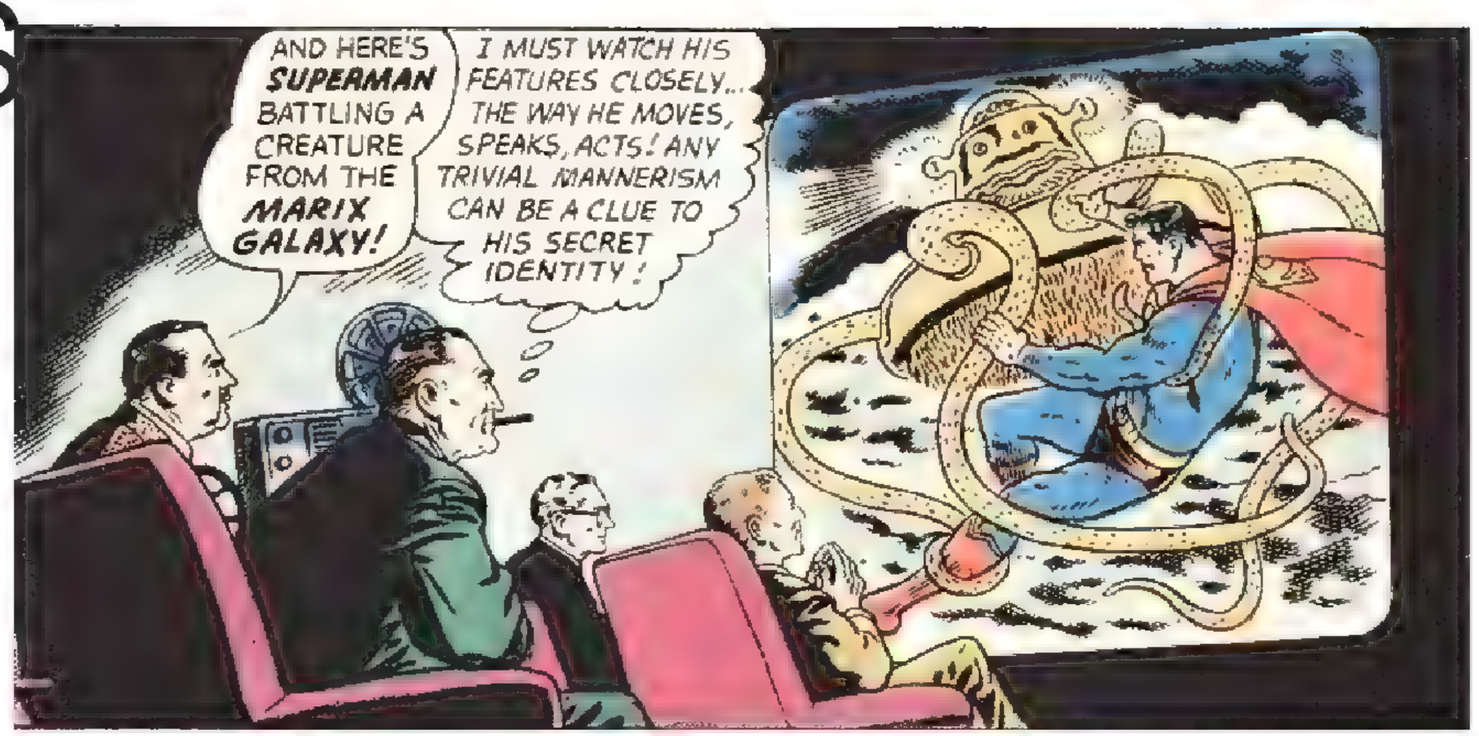
CC-M: Uhh, thanks Jenny. None of the above is true, except the "works solid" part. I swear to god.

BL: This summer, you did two European conventions in a weekend: Erlangen and Comics 2002 in Bristol. Could you compare the two experiences for us? Had you been to the UK or Germany before this?
CC-M: I'd been to the UK before, and as you can guess, I loved it. Germany was a new experience for me, but the people and beer were great, even if the food was completely frightening. As far as the cons go, the two are so insanely different it's like trying to compare SPX to the San Diego comic con. (Or, Comic Con International, whatever.) You can't really. The Erlangen con was bigger and shinier, and had an *amazing* art gallery, complete with spooky music, and was in the dark - the only way you could see the art (besides the slideshow on the huge screen) was to take out these short, light sabre type rods and hold them over the displays. It was the coolest gallery show I'd ever been to. There were tons of people there, and all kinds of bizarre stuff. Then to go from that to Bristol, even though it was a nice little show, it was in a non air-conditioned building during a heatwave, and it was just a bunch of booths like at any small press con, but with less color/posters, etc. I was there on Sunday, and everyone was dead sluggish, pretty sweaty, and obviously ready to go home. The city itself was ace, though.

BL: If you had to recommend just one Oni title, which one would it be, and why?
CC-M: Um, that would be Barry Ween. Simply because it's one of the funniest comic series I've ever read, and I absolutely guarantee big laughs... which as we all know, contributes to good health and extension of your lifespan. Judd Winick will make you immortal, man.

ISSUES

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's Carol Close! Our own rottweiler bitch!


AND HERE'S SUPERMAN BATTLING A CREATURE FROM THE MARIX GALAXY!
I MUST WATCH HIS FEATURES CLOSELY... THE WAY HE MOVES, SPEAKS, ACTS! ANY TRIVIAL MANNERISM CAN BE A CLUE TO HIS SECRET IDENTITY!

Caption: They've been making Superman movies for decades, y'know...

ON the face of it Superman is just about the blandest character in mainstream comics. And yet there's clearly something about Krypton's last son that seems to inflame the passions. If it's not roly-poly writer Mark Waid complaining on line about *Wizard* magazine's inaccurate reporting of a Kal-El related pitch he and some other writers made to DC a few years ago, it's the uber-geeks who inhabit Harry Knowles' Ain't It Cool News website getting a bee in their grubby baseball caps about a new Superman film script. Apparently the script, written by J.J. Abrams (who, among other things, penned the excellent TV series *Alias*), takes all sort of hilarious liberties with the Superman mythos and begins with a kung-fu kicking Kal-El on earth and involved in a *Matrix*-style scrap *not* with Brainiac or Doomsday but with another Kryptonian called "Ty-zor". It then goes on to reveal that Krypton was never destroyed at all and that baby Supes was sent to Earth to avoid capture by some *Terminator*-style robots, that Jimmy Olsen is gay, that Supes' costume is "alive" and that Lex Luthor (a CIA agent at the start of the movie) is a super-powered alien with plans to kill Superman and rule the world. And, if that isn't enough, Superman dies half way through the film, but is "persuaded" back to life by his dad, Jor-el, so he can go on to fulfil some ancient Kryptonian prophecy. Phew!

As you can imagine the fanboys have gone totally, utterly batshit about what they see as a betrayal of the Superman legend and abandonment of the character's established canon of references and untouchable plot elements. The one small problem that somewhat undermines their grievances is that Abrams' script sounds about a thousand times more interesting than anything DC have come up with for the character since they "killed him off" a decade ago. It's also true to say that however engaging the *Smallville* TV show is, can anyone really imagine it spinning off into a multi-million dollar movie franchise? Okay, so the script contains some patently ludicrous elements (I laughed out loud at the "reimagining" of Lex Luthor), but at least Abrams is thinking outside of the box when it comes to an increasingly hackneyed character whose comics no longer even make it into the Top 40 sales chart. Shit, if Superman were a rock band right now he'd probably be dropped by his record company and be bottom of the bill at the next Ozzfest!

It seems perfectly clear to me that the only way to kick start the *Superman* movie franchise again is to go with something radical, something that's going to get some headlines, something that's going to make people want to take a second look at a character they probably only ever think about when poor old Christopher Reeve shows up on the telly. Still, if movie bosses do decide to pass on Abrams' radical overhaul of the character, I suppose they could always try giving Mark Waid a call?

The Warren Ellis Forum shuffles off this mortal coil in the next few days and, although I've only ever had the time to log on as a guest and browse its myriad subject threads every now and then, I - and I suspect thousands of others - will miss its car crash entertainment value. For while it is true that the WEF (it stands for "We're Easily Fooled", as Kevin Smith memorably quipped) has spent much of the last four years championing various worthy indie titles and creators, writing the rulebook on "comics activism" and even helping Top Shelf out of its parlous financial state, I'll remember it with most fondness for the rudeness and pettiness of its host, the squawking abrasiveness of its harridan moderators and the wince-inducing sycophancy of many of its contributors. And I mean all that in the nicest possible way.

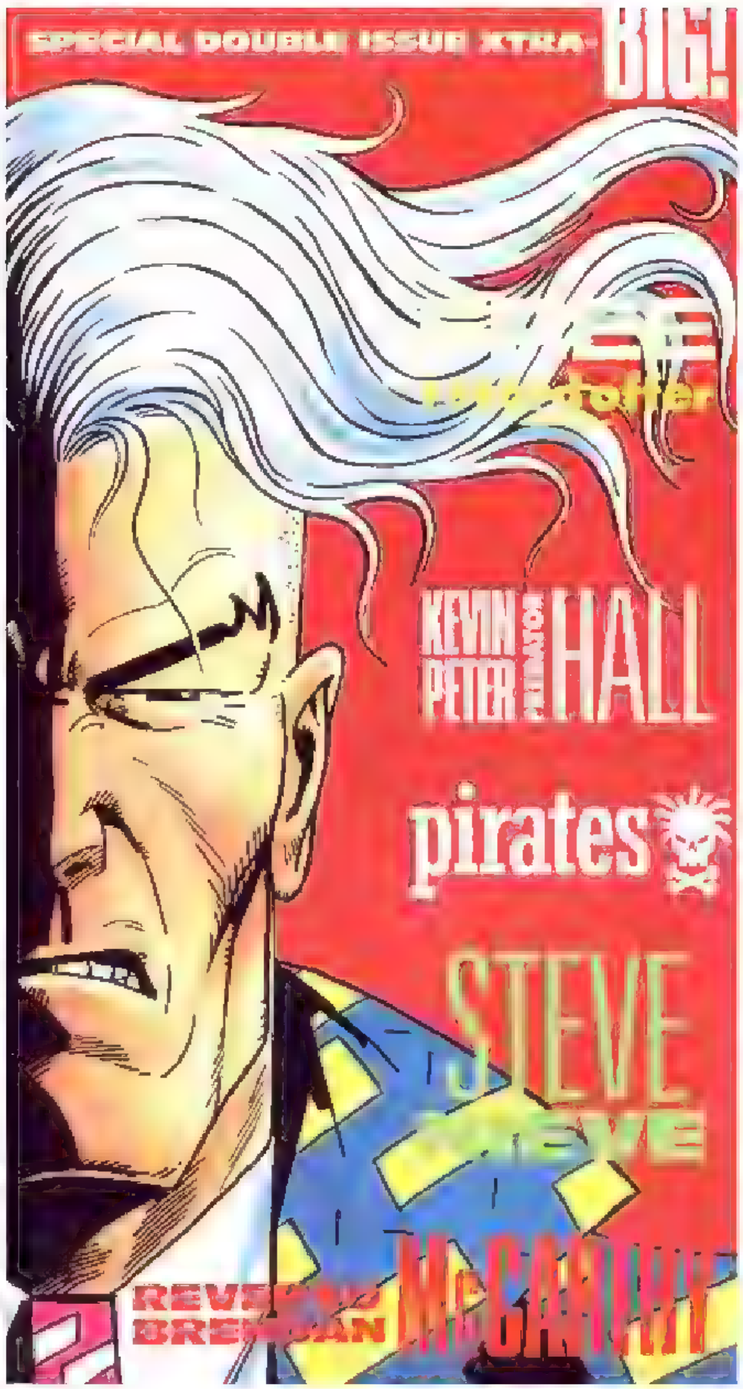
Actually, Ellis's decision to leave behind his "filthy assistants" and coterie of lickspittles (most of them Yanks, wouldn't you know it) could very easily be the making of the man. After all he's spent the last four years in an artificial bubble of critical approval that bears little relation to the way in which his work is *truly* viewed in the wider comics community (some of us - whisper it - think he's overrated). While it must have been very gratifying for him to have every issue of **Transmetropolitan** praised to the skies by several hundred fans every month (and each issue of **Planetary** every eight or nine months) it can't be much use if you're after a genuine critical appraisal of your work. That means facing up to the stuff people say you aren't actually very good at and working to improve it. It's how average writers become good writers and how good writers, like Ellis, occasionally become great ones.

Like one of those Japanese soldiers emerging out of the jungle umpteen years after the end of the Second World War, Ellis is about to return to the real world. Let's hope he makes the most of it.

I notice comicbookresources.com is currently selling t-shirts emblazoned with the legend "Comics Don't Suck". Anyone unable to afford the requisite $12.95 for one of these highly fashionable items might like to make their own instead. It's easy, just take a black marker pen and write across a plain white t-shirt the following words: "I Want To Remain A Virgin Forever". Believe me, it's a hell of a lot cheaper than a CBR shirt and conveys the *exact* same message.

SHARP DRESSED MAN

He's back – from Outer Space! Well, New London in 2263, by way of the 1980s and 90s, but Johnny Nemo is most definitely back, courtesy of Cyberosia Press, the indy publisher who loosed the award-winning Frightening Curves by Antony Johnston and Aman Chaudhary upon the world last year. Borderline's Jay Eales managed to speak with Nemo's parents, Brett Ewins and Peter Milligan, to ask if, like the title of their latest collaboration, it really is Time For Nemo?



Borderline: Can you spell out the chain of titles that Johnny Nemo has graced with his presence to date?
Peter Milligan: Johnny's first appearance was actually in a three part comic book written by me and drawn by Brett Ewins and Brendan McCarthy called Strange Days.
Brett Ewins: I invented Johnny Nemo for Strange Days, working with Brendan McCarthy and Peter Milligan. Next was three issues for The Johnny Nemo Magazine. Then Nemo appeared in Deadline Magazine, which I created with Steve Dillon. There was a collected edition by Deadline Books, and now the Cyberosia edition.

BL: My research uncovered a man called Tom Atencio, who has (or had) been developing Johnny Nemo *as a motion picture. How advanced is the process?*
PM: Tom Atencio is a L.A.-based manager/producer. In the past he has been involved with music acts like New Order and Jane's Addiction. He's now moving into the world of movies and is a great admirer of Nemo. There have been a number of meetings regarding Nemo as a movie. Having worked in this business for a while I tend not to be beguiled by the idea of a process being advanced. The English-speaking world is awash with projects "in development" or in "pre-production". Some people like Nemo. Some don't. Los Angeles is a long way from London. Anything could happen.

BL: The Observer *reported that Mel Gibson purchased TV rights to Nemo. Is that so, or is the Mel Gibson connection a Chinese whisper connected to Brendan McCarthy's involvement with the* Mad Max *franchise?*
PM: As much as I like Chinese whispers, this isn't one. Nor is it as exciting as it sounds. Mel himself - unless I am mistaken - didn't leap from wherever he leaps from, grab a copy of Johnny Nemo and swear to Danny Glover that he had to make this film. His company - Icon - showed an interest for a while, and we got a little option money from them I seem to recall... and then they moved on. And that's it.

BL: You've returned to the setting of New London for this collection, to produce an all-new tale: Time For Nemo. *Was it like putting on a favourite pair of shoes, or did you struggle to recapture the feel of the old strips? Have you brought Nemo up to date?*
PM: Good question. It's a character I haven't written for years. And Johnny is very much a mood. An attitude. Writing this new story I was aware of the temptation to "write better" than I used to. Clearly, if you read the story, you'll see that it's a temptation I managed admirably to withstand. But at the same time you can't travel back in time - unlike Johnny in this story - and repossess the body and mind of yourself and this character when you last met.
BE: Drawing illos of Nemo was easy, he's basically easy to draw - it's all in the chin, the eyebrows and the hair. Nemo has no need to be updated, as he is way ahead of his time anyway, also [they're] some of the funniest stories Peter Milligan has ever written.

BL: Has the experience whetted your appetite to create more new stories for "the peroxide god of violence"?
PM: Thinking about that last question - have I managed to bring Johnny Nemo up to date - makes me realize what a man for all times he is. The idea of writing more stories about 'the peroxide God' is a little scary, a bit like inviting your insane, drug-raddled anarchist friend to your grandmother's eightieth birthday party... but I think in these times more than ever we need someone to piss on the carpets and molest the Sunday school teacher.

BL: The book is dubbed Volume 1, *suggesting the possibility of further instalments. How many Nemo stories are left to collect?*
PM: You need to chat to Scott about this but as far as I know there are two more volumes after this one. Though it's late, I've just come back from a pub, and I might be entirely mistaken.
BE: There are three or four remaining stories, all in colour.
Scott Brown [*Big Cheese of Cyberosia Publishing*]: Current plans call for full colour reprints of the stories *New London Pride* and *The Spice of Death* in a second volume... beyond that, we'll see.

Johnny Nemo Volume One is an 88 page black and white trade paperback, retailing at $12.95 and shipping in November.

IN SEARCH OF...

David McLintock's been surfing for veteran artists again. This month he tells you why Alex Toth is like The Beatles; but not for the reasons you might be thinking of...

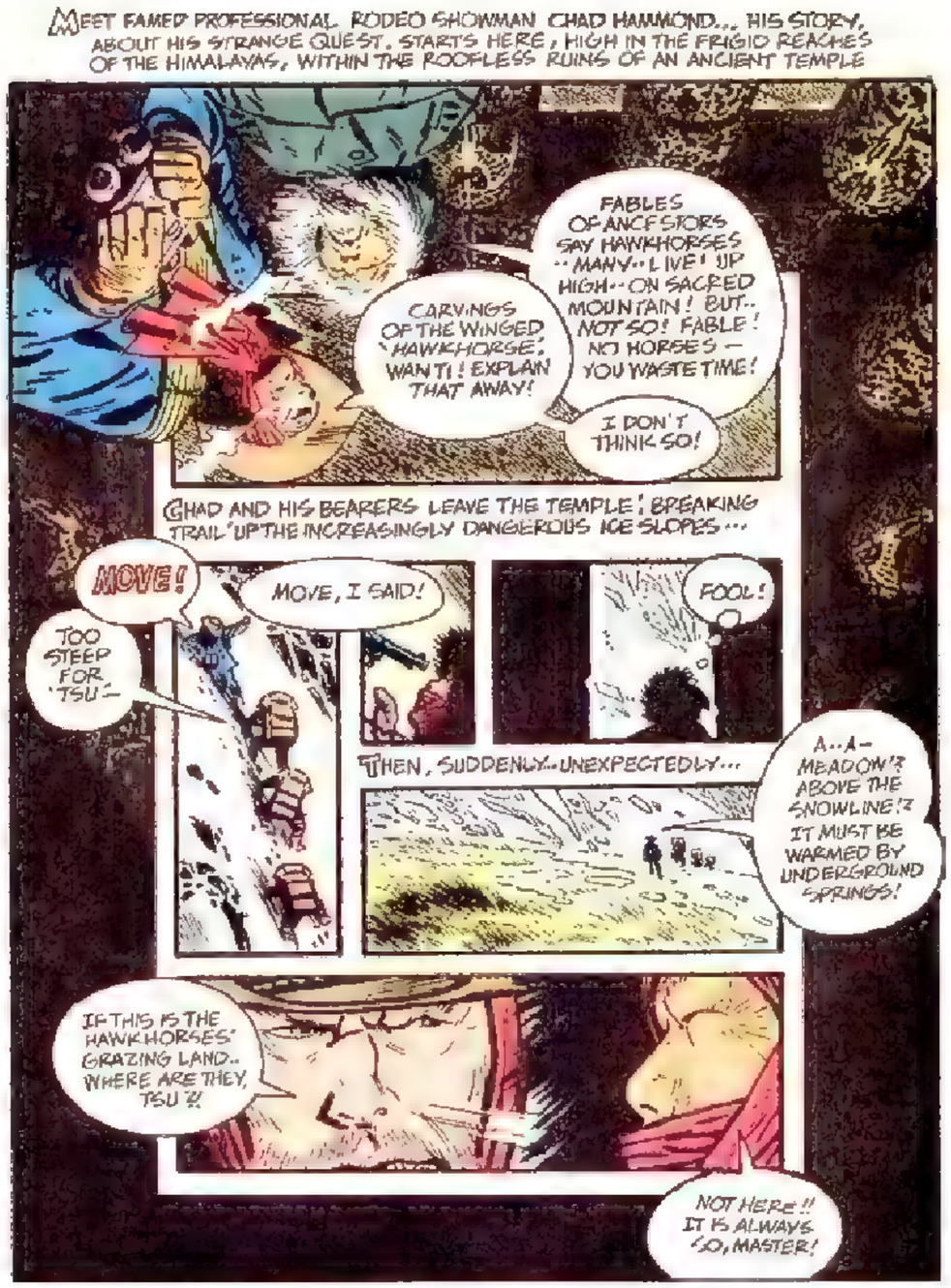
AFTER running off at a tangent last month, it's back to the more "mainstream" for yours truly. But, as ever, there's a method to my madness. Listening to *Revolver,* by a popular beat combo from Liverpool called (get this) "The Beatles", I began to re-appraise the drumming skills of one Richard Starkey, aka Ringo Starr. Now, as someone brought up on a diet of the god-like Keith Moon (apparently there are guitars, keyboards and even vocals on the Who track *Won't Get Fooled Again,* but I've never heard them...) and Mr. "Four Sticks", John Bonham, poor Ringo had his work cut out to convince this long time sceptic. But on *She Said, She Said* and *Tomorrow Never Knows* he gives a pretty good impression of a drummer. I'm not fully convinced but I'm less sceptical. Where does all this inconsequentiality lead me, you ask, already hovering your mouse over the next page button? It leads me to Alex Toth, is where. I confess that, heresy though it may be to many, I've never been impressed by this fella and, as with Van Morrison and Bruce Springsteen, I've always been mystified as to why he is held in such esteem. So, my ulterior motive in pursuing Mr. Toth across the web is to see if I can convince myself that I've been right all along, or, perish forbid, eat humble pie and concede Toth's genius, throwing myself on the mercy of the comics court and begging forgiveness. Without the benefit of a safety net, in we plunge...

The good news is that there is no shortage of Toth online. The bad news is that it's hard work trying to separate the wheat from the chaff. Lord knows the number of silly wee boys who feel the need to set up "My homage to an Artist I Think is Fab" websites, then proceed to astound us with their ignorance of their "hero". Poor Alex Toth is just one of their many victims. So huzzah for "Tothfans" on *www.tothfans.dynu.com/tothfans/tothfans.asp*, an example of a superior fan site which is a perfect place to learn Tothology. Of particular interest is the "annotated Toth" section where Mr. Toth pulls apart lots of his own artwork, pointing out what he feels he could have done better or, more occasionally, where he went right. It's a fascinating insight into the mind of a comics professional. Undoubtedly his Warren work, and especially *The Monument*, is a masterpiece of framing and mood. I'm almost converted...

There's loads more on the site including articles, gallery, news etc., with a new classic Toth page added daily. A related site is "Twenty Questions with Alex Toth" at *www.tvparty.com/comics/toth1.htm* - related in the sense that the questioner is Toth fan John Hitchcock, a major player on the fan site. Toth answers questions on his major influences (Milton Caniff, Roy Crane and Noel Sickles), his life and his work, including his years at Hanna-Barbera working on character design and storyboards. The blurb for this site credits him with *Space Ghost*, but I'm less sure he's the sole creator of *Scooby-Doo*. Toth did do all the major characters for *Super Friends*.

Currently he likes Corben's, Mazzuchelli's and Mignola's art, but is far less enamoured of the more mature element: "many talents abound in Europe but they show only an ugly and sick

One of those violent European strips Toth doesn't like; he pulled out of this 1981 series after only two stories


MEET FAMED PROFESSIONAL RODEO SHOWMAN CHAD HAMMOND... HIS STORY, ABOUT HIS STRANGE QUEST, STARTS HERE, HIGH IN THE FRIGID REACHES OF THE HIMALAYAS, WITHIN THE ROOFLESS RUINS OF AN ANCIENT TEMPLE
CARVINGS OF THE WINGED "HAWKHORSE", WANTI! EXPLAIN THAT AWAY!
FABLES OF ANCESTORS SAY HAWKHORSES "MANY" LIVE! UP HIGH--ON SACRED MOUNTAIN! BUT.. NOT SO! FABLE! NO HORSES — YOU WASTE TIME!
I DON'T THINK SO!
CHAD AND HIS BEARERS LEAVE THE TEMPLE, BREAKING TRAIL UP THE INCREASINGLY DANGEROUS ICE SLOPES...
MOVE!
TOO STEEP FOR 'TSU—
MOVE, I SAID!
FOOL!
THEN, SUDDENLY--UNEXPECTEDLY...
A--A— MEADOW? ABOVE THE SNOWLINE!? IT MUST BE WARMED BY UNDERGROUND SPRINGS!
IF THIS IS THE HAWKHORSES' GRAZING LAND.. WHERE ARE THEY, TSU?
NOT HERE!! IT IS ALWAYS SO, MASTER!

A complex 1972 Toth layout from Adventure Comics #425

and violent world in their work which I want nothing to do with". So, no bated breath waiting for the next Garth Ennis/ Alex Toth extravaganza, then. Yet, if there's a place for Toth's artistic style in today's comics, then surely its natural home would be Vertigo? But don't tell Alex I said so. Born in 1928 he also laments the passing of the adventure strips which spawned so many pre-colour comics talents. He's not alone there.

www.tvparty.com/losttoth.html has a 1973 Toth sketch, for *Super Friends*, of Wonder Woman, and alludes to other creations such as *Josie and the Pussycats* (Toth alone? *The original characters were created by the great Dan De Carlo – Production Ed.)* and *The Herculoids*. I had them once, but some ointment did the trick. "The Alex Toth Original Art Gallery" at *www.comicartville.com/tothgallery.htm* doesn't mince words by proclaiming, "Toth may be the world's greatest living comic artist". No fence sitters, these lads. The gallery has many fine examples of Toth's best work, but I'm less convinced where colour is involved, and the samples of his superhero work seem to me to show limitations. But hey, we can't all be perfect. Included is page 1 from Standard's Thrilling Romances #23, inked by Mike Peppe, which only goes to show the gaps in my collection. And try as I might I never found DC's Hot Wheels #2-5, hot rod comics passing me by.

If I want to buy collected Toth then the best place is at Auad Publishing, *www.auadpublishing.com.htm*, who, among other things, have collected his hot rod stuff - put together, it does seem more coherent. The site also has a Toth biog, our hero being born in New York to Hungarian parents, first picking up a drawing pencil at age three. He studied illustration at The High School of Industrial Arts, getting his first paid work on Famous Funnies. The Hungarian connection may explain finding an "Alex Toth" on "The Romanian Soccer Page", where he apparently stars for Timisoara, the Romanian equivalent of Manchester Utd. Believe me, at *www.timisoara.com/soccer.html*. Playing up front at the age of 74, it's hardly surprising old Alex limits his comics work these days.

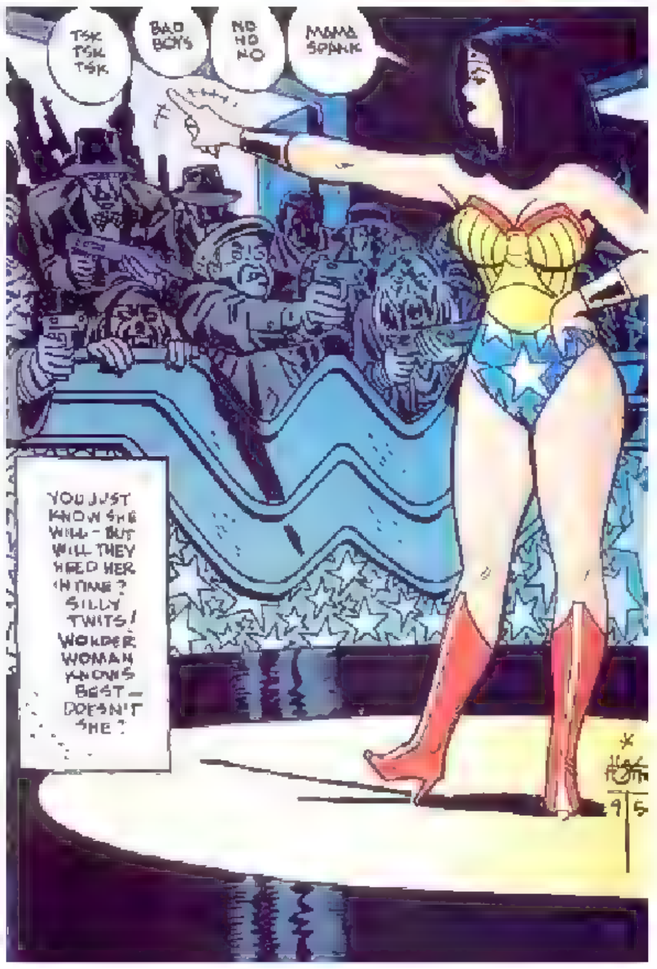
There is the obligatory Toth group on Yahoo at *www.yahoo.com/group/toth*. Join them if only to boost membership from the embarrassing number of 69 members. I tried and kept getting these flashing adverts urging me to "lose ten pounds", as if my svelte 13 stone could be improved on. "The 100 Greatest Comic Artists", *www.chicago.net/~atlas/best9.htm*, places Toth at number 11, two behind the all but forgotten EC stalwart Bernard Krigstein. Buy a Toth *Herculoids* animation cell for $200 at *www.anthonysnyder.com/art/strip_art.html*, although it is described as "designed by Toth, this work is by studio artists". Er, yes, and I've a bunch of original Neal Adams-designed pages for a fiver, albeit actually drawn by a little known Glasgow genius... "Classic Johnny Quest Animation Cels" at *www.classicjq.com/artifacts/cels/JQCels.html* is self-explanatory, but in searching for Toth I was intrigued by "Bitter People Around the World" at *www.sealander.com/Bitterworld.html*. But all I could find was a list of addresses, with no clue as to why these people were "bitter", or their connection to Alex Toth.

There is more Toth artwork on *www.donbrockway.com/TMCDDELL1.JPG*, a rather nice page from Toth's work on Classics Illustrated's version of H.G. Wells' The Time Machine. Toth's take on The Question is at *www.oklahoma.net/%7Esilvdal/toth.html*, although as a Ditko sentimentalist at heart I have to say it's OK but nowt spectacular.

So, am I at last a Toth convert? Not quite, but there is still plenty to explore, especially his Warren work. Plenty of today's top dogs kow-tow to the great man, and I'm not about to argue with them. But sadly, poor old Springsteen and Van the Man have far less hope. I'm going to see Keith Emerson and The Nice, so I am. At last.

BUT NOW? WHAT POWER DID HE USE?
THE SCHOOL STOPPED SHAKING! WHY? WHAT'S HE UP TO NOW?
HE'S JUST TOYING WITH US! HE'S SHOWING HIS CONTEMPT FOR OUR DEFENSES!
SHOULDN'T WE RUSH OUT AND FIGHT HIM NOW... BEFORE HE COMES CLOSER??
NO! THERE'S STILL TIME. TIME FOR ME TO TELL YOU MORE ABOUT HOW IT ALL BEGAN!
KRAK!
BRRAMM!
Toth's tryout for Marvel, pencilling X-Men #12 over Kirby's layouts. No-one was impressed!

IT WAS A BITTER JEST AMONG SHOW PEOPLE – NEVER, UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES, PLAY IN THE SAME THEATRE WITH TED WARDE – NOT IF YOU DON'T WANT TO CLOSE ON OPENING NIGHT! TED HAD EVERYTHING A YOUNG ACTOR NEEDED! GOOD LOOKS, WINNING PERSONALITY AND LOTS OF REAL 'TALENT.' EVERYONE SAID HE WAS A 'STINK.' EVERYONE BUT ME. YOU SEE, I LOVED HIM, ALTHOUGH PEOPLE WARNED ME THAT MINE TOO WOULD BECOME AN
Unlucky HEART
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT! WE GOT GOOD NOTICES - WHY DO PEOPLE STAY AWAY?
YOU'RE NEW IN THE THEATRE! YOU'LL LEARN THAT IF YOU'RE IN THE SAME PLAY WITH TED WARDE YOU'RE LUCKY IF YOU RUN A WEEK! HE'S A JINX!
STAGE DOOR
ART THEATRE
TED AND I WALKED SLOWLY AWAY. I LONGED TO COMFORT HIM IN SOME WAY BUT THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO. THIS HAD BEEN HIS FIRST IMPORTANT ROLE AND JOHN TRAVIS, THE PRODUCER, HAD GIVEN IT TO HIM AGAINST EVERYONE'S ADVICE. NOW IT WAS ALL OVER...
THEY'RE RIGHT, JUDY! EVERY PLAY I'VE EVER BEEN IN HAS FLOPPED! I'M NO GOOD TO MYSELF, OR ANYONE ELSE!
DON'T SAY THAT, TED! YOU'RE A FINE ACTOR AND SOMEDAY EVERYONE WILL KNOW IT!
21-year old Toth draws romance in Girls' Love Stories #1

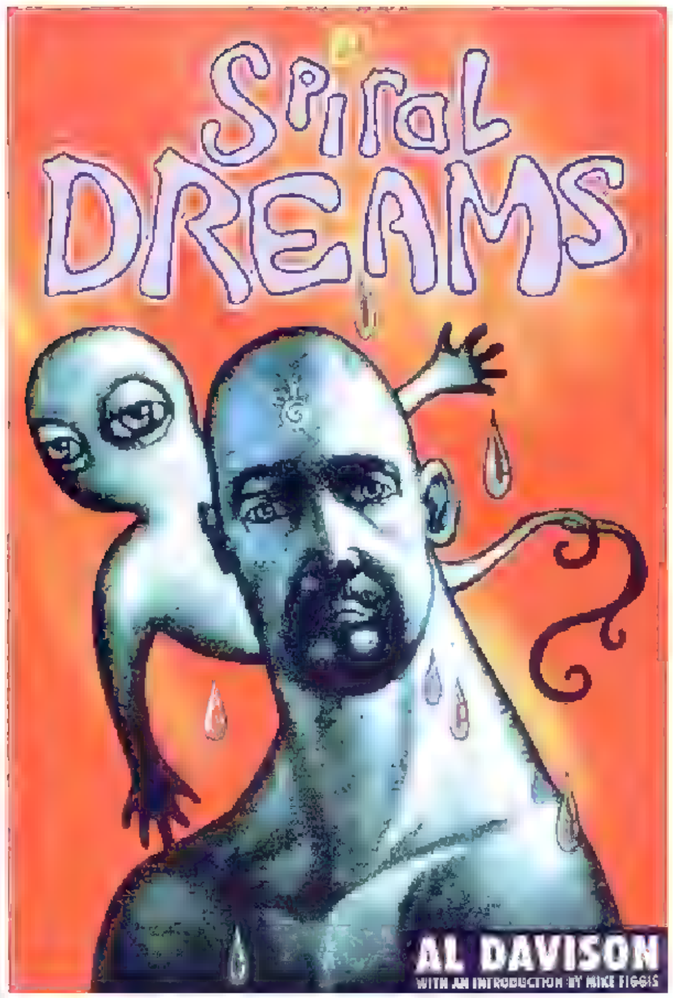

TSK TSK TSK
BAD BOYS
NO NO NO
MAMA SPANK
YOU JUST KNOW SHE WILL - BUT WILL THEY NEED HER IN TIME? SILLY TWITS! WONDER WOMAN KNOWS BEST – DOESN'T SHE?
A 1995 pinup piece

DREAMTIME

Borderline's Jay Eales catches up with man of many talents Al Davison for a few minutes...

A PRACTICING Buddhist, an assistant Shaolin Kung Fu instructor with a black belt in karate, a theatrical set and costume designer, a fight choreographer and sometime actor, a professional comic book artist/writer, a small press publisher and a sufferer of severe Spina Bifida. Who are all these people, you ask? Al Davison, I answer.

I'm not sure how Davison manages to wear so many hats at once, or cram as much into each day as he does. Perhaps it's his way of sticking an upraised middle finger to the medical expert who, on Davison's birth, suggested that Al wouldn't last more than a few hours at best, and described him as "a vegetable." Well, the last laugh's on you, buddy!



A self-portrait of Davison on the cover of his Slab-O-Concrete collection

Davison recently took the plunge into small press publishing, by starting Astral Gypsy Press, and launching **Spiral Dreams**, a black and white title following on from an earlier book of the same name published through the sadly now defunct Slab-O-Concrete. To date, two issues have been published, available from Davison's website *[www.astralgypsy.com]*, and at Gosh and Comics Showcase, individually, or as a set with a limited edition print. **Spiral Dreams** features stories and illustrations based on dreams. The first issue, *The Invisible Library*, as Davison explains: "was actually drawn last June, after I decided to take the Scott McCloud 24 hour comic challenge. I produced the whole book in 24 hours on the Mac, with a graphics tablet, using the pencil tool. Only the images in the gallery section and the cover design were produced later." Issue 2, entitled *Sobakz's Dream*, contains a silent dream within a dream. **Spiral Dreams** #3 will hopefully be available by the time this issue of **Borderline** goes live, adapting a dream that Davison recently experienced at an annual Buddhist summer course, hearing a lecture by a Hiroshima survivor. Davison also hopes to do an all-ages Christmas special featuring 'MEEP', his childhood dream alter-ego. Beyond that, there are plans for a collected edition, and further issues of **Spiral Dreams** as sales allow. "**Spiral Dreams** is basically a try-out, with the aim of starting to publish the new **Spiral Cage** material next year. Hopefully, we will have got the hang of things by then. It is hard work doing everything yourself, carting round stock on the back of my wheelchair, sorting orders, printing, etc, but also satisfying. Anything we make is going in the kitty for **Spiral Cage** #2. Luckily, I have had teaching work over the summer, which has helped with the finances, and the adverts in issue 2 covered the print bill."

Davison was present at the Caption small press convention last August, and enthused: "A great experience. We sold as much on the Saturday as we did at Bristol, about half that on Sunday. The organisers were very helpful - when they realised I had the wheelchair, and that the seminars were upstairs (no lift), they reorganised them to be held in the garden. Luckily the weather was brilliant. Everyone was helpful and willing to answer all my questions and offer support."

At one Caption panel, Davison regaled the audience with an anecdote about an irate small press fan who harangued him at Comics 2002. For the benefit of **Borderline** readers not in attendance: "My wife was off on a food run. I was on the table by myself, when three small press fans turned up. I use the term fan here, in the same context that some reporters call football hooligans 'fans'. The ringleader started by flicking through **Spiral Dreams** (the graphic novel) and flinging it down. The exchange went something like this:

Fan: You people are ruining the small press scene. You aren't satisfied with making pots of money doing mainstream hack-work, you have to move in on our scene. Why don't you stick to what you know!

Mates: Yeah!

Al: This is what I know, making comics.

Fan: It's bad enough that you 'published' types come in to self publishing, but what I really hate is you bringing all this 'flashy Drawing shit' with you. The 'correct anatomy' and 'perspective' crap... it makes it harder for the rest of us, soon people will think they have to be able to 'draw' to do small press, and then where would we be?

Al: Same place as Paul Grist, Dave Sim, Charles Vess, Phil Yeh, Jeff Smith, Gary Millidge and Steve Marchant... producing good comics. Everyone can draw, and most people, whether working for DC or photocopying mini-comics want to do the best work they can. Where's the problem?

Fan: That's shit! I don't want to see small press comics looking like fucking 'Image' shit!

Mates: Yeah, yeah!

Al: Then don't draw them that way. Do what you want, that's what I'm doing. That's why I self-publish.

Fan: Bollocks.

"As they left, one of this guy's mates parting shot was 'Don't know how you got into DC anyway. This stuff's shit!'

"It's a funny life sometimes."

Dance of Life: just one of an infinity of styles on view in Spiral Dreams

PIXEL POWER

THE PERSON BEHIND THE PIXELS

Marvel's dotComics have become a huge success story for the company's website - especially since John D. Roberts came on the scene. Borderline's Mike Sivier talked to John with the specific brief of finding out more about the genesis of the dotComics phenomenon.

Borderline: How did the Marvel dotComics come into being? Whose idea were they?
John D. Roberts: When Bill Jemas came to Marvel he wanted to do comic books online, so he worked with Jung Choi of Transparency Digital and Tim Smith, who works in the Bullpen, to put together ideas for what would become the dotComics. Fortunately for me, their early attempts were poorly constructed, took forever to download and were basically not all that appealing.

So I was hired by Gui Karyo to make the dotComics smaller, faster and prettier. My background is in web design and I have been doing multimedia/web/graphic design for approximately six or seven years now.

I focus primarily on Macromedia Flash - which is how the dotComics are made - and am a bit of an expert, so my expertise made me perfect for the job at hand.

I was able to create a system that was easy to maintain and manage, had smaller file sizes, was more attractive and easier to use.

BL: Can you describe the process by which a dotComic is made? It all looks very clever on the screen.
JDR: The key to the dotComics is also the key to the comic making process as it now exists.

Currently the process involved in creating a comic book is primarily digital. What this means, for those who don't know, is that the artwork created by the artists is scanned into the computer, the colorist then uses a computer coloring program like Adobe Photoshop to color it, while the letterer uses Adobe Illustrator to letter the book and QuarkXpress to assemble the whole thing before it is converted to a high-res PDF file and sent to the printer.

Because all of the assets - files related to a book - are digital, it's perfect for use in Flash or online in general.

The lettering is done in Illustrator, which is a vector-based application. Vector means that the images are created based on points - x and y coordinates - since the points are all mathematical properties, the file sizes of vector images are significantly smaller than those of bitmaps. It also means a vector image retains its clarity whether at 10 per cent or 100 per cent. For an example, please look at a page on my own website, http://www.johnnystorm.com/flash/vector/ .

The graphics were colored in Photoshop, which is a bitmap-based application. Bitmap images are images such as Jpegs and Gif images, that are based on pixels or dots to create an image. The more dots, the larger the file size, the less dots, the poorer the quality of the image as it is increased in size.

Since Flash is a vector-based application and supports bitmaps, it was an easy task to assemble the digital files inside of Flash. Only two problems remained: the text at 100 per cent was unreadable; and a comicbook is a portrait-based system - it is thinner and wider, like a portrait - and digital is landscape-based - it's wider and thinner, like a landscape painting.

The former was easy - we simply increased the size of the lettering to 130 per cent; the latter, however required more thought. The answer? Break the page up into parts based on panels, and have them grow up in size one after the other.

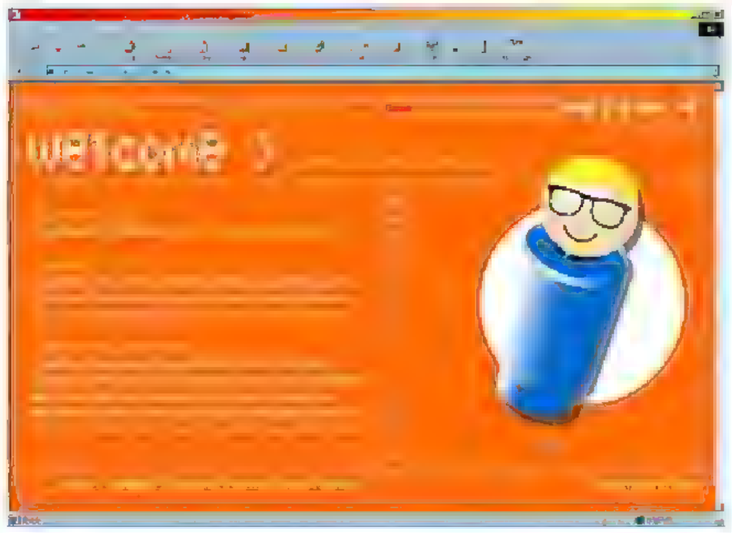
BL: How well-received were they?
JDR: They are very popular; we manage to get 20,000 hits a day, and at our best we were getting 80k a day. In May we did three million hits, thanks in part to the *Spider-Man* movie. They've been pretty well accepted since the beginning; we get some criticism but mostly because of storylines and not technology.

BL: *How has the site grown? How many comics did you put up at the start, how often did you add new ones - and how many are there now/ how often do you add new dotComics?*

JDR: Initially we started out just doing Ultimate Spider-Man, then added Ultimate X-Men, then we added more titles - at our height we had eight monthly titles, plus mini-series, including Origin which was hard to find in stores. Now the focus is more marketing-based, instead focusing on preview titles and providing advance looks at upcoming titles such as Eden's Trail.

BL: How do you choose which of the Marvel comics get to be dotComics?
JDR: The choice of what goes up on [the] Marvel [site] is based on the Marketing initiative.

BL: Do you plan, eventually, to produce the whole Marvel line as dotComics? If not, why not?
JDR: Bill Jemas would like to make a dotComic to accompany each print version... While that's the ideal, it's currently not practical, mostly because of costs. Currently the dotComics are free and it is Marvel's decision to keep them free.



BL: Who decides which comics get to be dotComics and what are their priorities?
JDR: Again that's a decision based on the Marketing initiative. Since the dotComics are primarily seen as a marketing tool, they must adhere to the marketing plan.

BL: Isn't there a fear that dotComics could detract from the sales of printed-on-paper Marvel comics?
JDR: Actually the response has been the opposite. Books that get converted to dotComics usually sell better than issues that don't; I think it's because people want to have a physical print copy of the books that they like, and they learn to like them online, so that translates into more sales at stores. It also helps retailers get an idea of what a book is like before it comes out, so they can decide whether they want to order more.

BL: As I understand it, dotComics get their revenue from advertising. Does this mean we won't see any Marvel comics which were published prior to the advent of dotComics appearing? Or is this an opportunity for the company to resell the advertising pages, to make such a project cost-effective?
JDR: The problem with creating dotComics based on books prior to the digital age is basically the way lettering was done in the past. Lettering done on the boards is converted to bitmaps and is more difficult to use in dotComics for that reason. So currently there are no plans to convert older issues, but that may change or may be done on a case-by-case basis.

Anyone wanting to see what John does away from dotComics can check out his website at http://www.johnnystorm.com.

THE POWER, THE PAGES AND THE PIXELS

A quiet revolution has been taking place at the Marvel Comics website (http://www.marvel.com), where visitors are gradually being allowed to read increasing amounts of Marvel material online. Borderline*'s Mike Sivier flicked through a few virtual pages.*

"THIS dotComics thing must be pretty important to Marvel" - that's the kind of thinking inspired by the front page of the company's website, where dotComics are the very first item to grab the eye. Or would be if the self-shuffling cards advertising Marvel's *Recharge* game weren't so damn' obtrusive.

But we're not here to discuss the pros and cons of overzealous merchandising - at least not directly. One click on the dotComics logo and you're into the zone. A new browser window opens up on your desktop and - if you're a dial-up fogey like me - you get to wait a while with a "loading" screen in front of you.

Once loaded up, you are presented with the option of visiting two sections. The first part offers special previews of new or forthcoming issues but is limited in what it offers, while the members' area provides access to the archive of dotComics already placed on the web. You need to register to get onto this members-only area. Don't get alarmed! There's no cost involved, other than time, so why not?

Once in, you're faced with scrolling menus which are easy to use, indices of titles and available issues, and the currently-selected issue showcased with a cover image. Scroll up and down the menus to pick out the comic you want and it'll appear in the central area. Click on that - and guess what? *Another* new window opens and you're waiting for the page to load up - again. If this kind of behaviour makes you impatient, just remember: it's quicker than hauling your keister all the way down to the local comics shop and buying the comic yourself, isn't it? Cheaper, too - or at least it was in the case of the comic I chose for this review: The Incredible Hulk #34, entitled *The Morning After*. I missed this when it hit the shops, and wanted to see if there really had been cause for a fuss.

After a while, the screen starts to fill up with interesting shapes looking not unlike the images you should see dotted around this page to accompany the article. The comic's cover appears, with a list of page numbers beneath it and a pair of arrow keys to allow navigation to pages before or after those available on-screen. But you click on the cover reproduction to start your reading experience.

An animated sequence kicks in, turning the page for you - and putting you face to face with what will become the bane of your dotComics life: the advert. There are about a dozen ad pages dotted through the comic and - trust me - they'll really screw up your concentration. The act of turning the page makes the advertising image leap forward, off the page, to fill your screen, and arrow options prompt you to click *here* to turn the page or click *here* for further information.

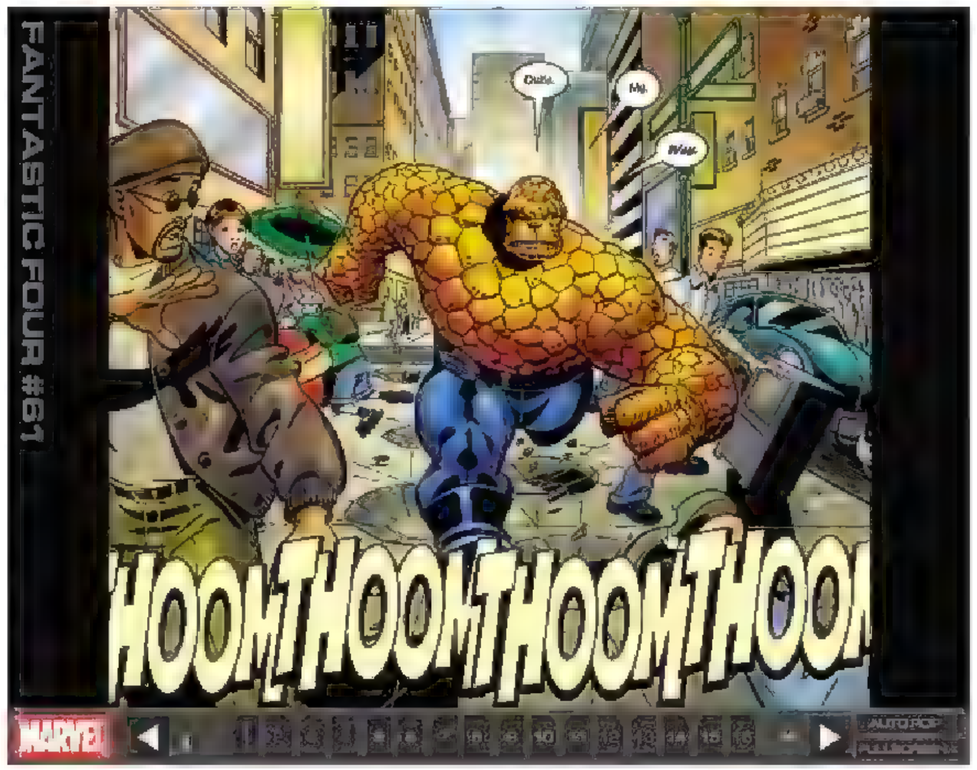
Presumably, that further information would be about whatever the advert is for; but I'm a big lousy chicken with short-term memory loss who always clicked to turn the page back to the story before I forgot what it was about, so you won't get to find out in this article. As I understand it, though, the adverts are how dotComics make their money, so we'll have to treat them as a necessary evil.

The first page of the story appears at last, and you can settle down for the read. The full page appears on the screen before you - too low-res to read, but if you pass your mouse arrow over different areas of the page, they'll shade over. Click on the shaded part of the page and it will expand, leaping off the page to fill the screen as much as it is able, depending on the sizes and shapes of the panels in the highlighted section. To complete the transformation, the lettering appears and you can actually start reading the comic. When you've finished with the section you've expanded, click on it again and it'll shrink back down onto the page and you're free to choose another. Finish the page and you can click on the next page number and watch the page-turning animation go to work again. Repeat as necessary until you've finished the comic.

There are only a couple of snags. The first is when you click to turn a page and get yet another loading screen. By now, you'll be thinking "God, no - the *wait*! How long this time, Lord, how long?" In fact, it's not long at all - but it certainly seems like it. Worse still is when you click for the next page and for some reason it completely fails to load up. It jams somehow and you have to work out a way of jolting the system back to life. But these are both mechanical problems to do with download speeds and other Internet hiccups. You can't blame the site itself for them.

The site does exactly what it sets out to do: it allows you to read a comic. Is it the same as reading a printed-on-paper Marvel comic? No! But it's close. A fair analogy would be comparing buying a comic with reading it in a library. Reading dotComics feels like reading in a library. You can't take it home with you.

But you could still go out and buy it - if, unlike The Incredible Hulk #34, it's still affordable.



TRANSATLANTIC MEDITATIONS

Arnold T. Blumberg – Borderline's US correspondent – looks at All Hallows' Eve...

"Why are you dressed like that?"
"What do you mean? It's my Halloween costume!"
"You're wearing that for Halloween? That?"
"Why not?"
"I think you're crazy."
"Think away, this is what I'm wearing."
"And what's that?"
"That's a bag of comics. I'm giving them out as treats this year instead of candy."
"Now that's a rather brilliant idea."
"Well, it's not original. For years now, retailers and distributors have been using Halloween to help spread the good word about the comic book medium."
"Has it worked?"
"Um...well, not that we can tell, but it can't hurt. After all, the little tykes will be getting more than enough candy Halloween night. Why not give them something to read that will show them how much fun comics can be?"
"Amen to that. But do you think there will even be trick-or-treaters this year? It was real quiet last year."
"True, but that was because of 9-11. Everyone was so depressed back then that the entire country basically took a break from Halloween. Who wanted to revel in macabre mayhem when an all-too-real horror had played out on the television just a month before?"
"I see what you mean."
"But I say this year we have to move fast to reclaim Halloween and bring back the fun in fantasy terror, and what better way than to hand out some comics to all the boos and ghouls this Samhain?"
"This what?"
"The Festival of the Dead."
"Oh. So what comics are you planning to give out?"
"Well, we always get a wide cross-section of ages. It's a very eclectic neighborhood, you know. So I've picked out some choices for different age categories. Always pays to be prepared."
"What's this?"
"That's Sirius' **Akiko**, a delightful book for all ages about a girl who goes on interplanetary adventures with a wacky cast of characters. And this is Cartoon Books' **Bone**, maybe just a bit more sophisticated but still a great series for children and adults."
"They look nice. Wait a minute - this chick is hardly wearing any clothes!"
"Heh heh, well that's not for the kiddies. I'm saving that for any of the fathers who might want a treat of their own. Those are copies of Harris Comics' **Vampirella**, and the now-defunct Chaos! Comics' **Lady Death** and **Purgatori**. They aren't high-minded literature, but they do fit the Halloween theme for anyone who might like that sort of thing. You have to know your audience."
"OK, I'll go along with that. Oh this is interesting - Abstract Studios' **Strangers in Paradise**."
"Yup, still one of the best comics out there not featuring superheroes and endless grudge matches. A story about two young women and the emotional intrigue that swirls around them. A good treat for young adults, especially female readers."
"Looks like you have selections for just about everybody. Surely you've got some spandex types in there too though?"
"Of course, there will always be fans of superheroes. That's why I tossed in some copies of the latest issues of Marvel's **Amazing Spider-Man** by J. Michael Straczynski and DC's **Supergirl** by Peter David, both superb series that play off some familiar superheroic themes with new vitality. And **Supergirl** is another good choice for female trick-or-treaters."
"What are these big books in here?"
"Those are for anyone who really wants to explore some of the best that comics have to offer. There's Art Spiegelman's **Maus**, the DC Archives, the

A Carl Giles example of a British Halloween circa 1985.

Marvel Masterworks, Dan Clowes' **Ghost World**, a whole stack of Will Eisner graphic novels, the trade paperback of **Watchmen**, the four-volume..."

"Aren't those a bit pricey? They're more like Christmas presents than Halloween party favors."

"Whatever. Halloween or Christmas, it's all about giving and spreading joy."

"I thought Halloween was originally all about offering sacrifices to the spirits or something."

"You're really no fun to talk to, you know that?"

"All right, all right. You take your comic book literature seriously don't you?"

"Of course! And Halloween is a perfect time of year to introduce all ages to the joys of reading comics. While they're snacking on candy corn, chewing gummi bears or eating chocolate bars, they can be exploring worlds of fantasy and adventure in the pages of comic books too!"

"OK, you've sold me. Give me a few of those and I'll hand them out on Halloween night also. But...you're really going to wear that?"

"Yes! I don't see what's wrong with it!"

"It just doesn't make any sense."

"And what, pray tell, doesn't make sense?"

"Since when does a shambling zombie feel the need to wear anything else on Halloween? You're already dressed for the occasion."

"I may be a zombie the rest of the year, but on Halloween I'm going to be a silver spaceman!"

"Sure you are. Come to think of it, how likely is it that any kids are going to come by our crypt for trick-or-treats? All these comics are going to go to waste."

"You're right. I don't know what I was thinking."

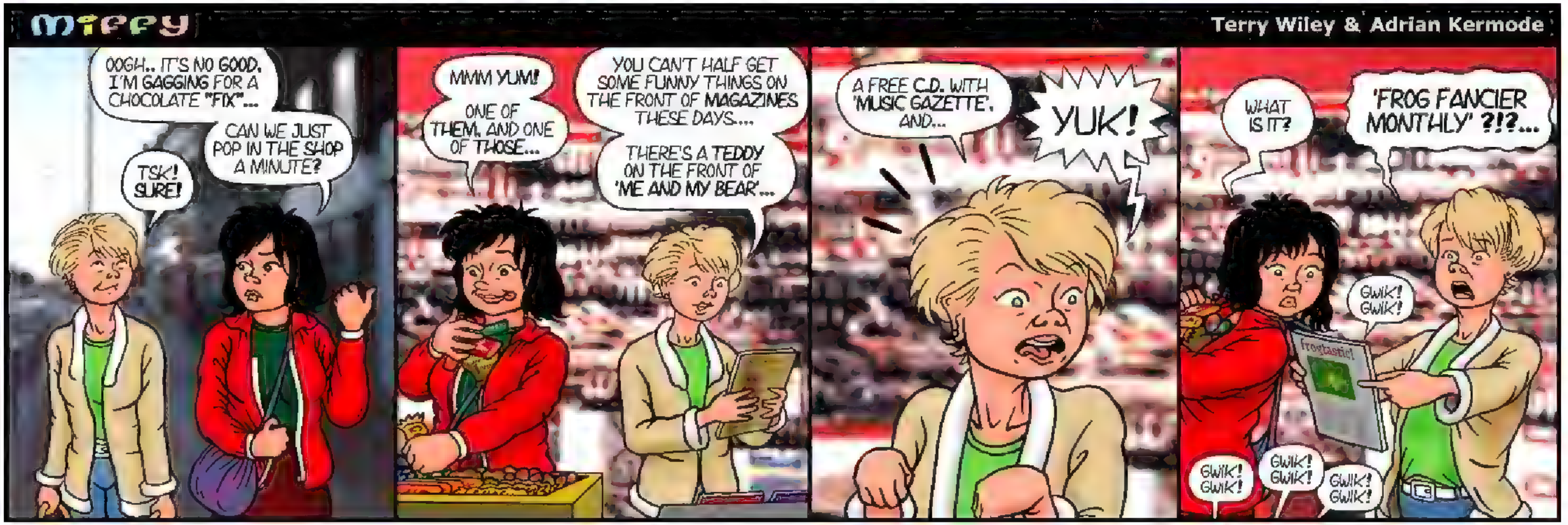
"Maybe some humans will pass out comics on Halloween after all. They might even throw in some reprint issues of EC's **Tales From the Crypt**!"

"I never liked that series. It wasn't realistic."

"You're just saying that because our cousin Ernie got the Crypt-Keeper gig instead of you..."

"I am not!"

With apologies to EC Comics and Jack Davis...


Miffy
Terry Wiley & Adrian Kermode
OOGH.. IT'S NO GOOD, I'M GAGGING FOR A CHOCOLATE "FIX"...
TSK! SURE!
CAN WE JUST POP IN THE SHOP A MINUTE?
MMM YUM!
ONE OF THEM, AND ONE OF THOSE...
YOU CAN'T HALF GET SOME FUNNY THINGS ON THE FRONT OF MAGAZINES THESE DAYS...
THERE'S A TEDDY ON THE FRONT OF 'ME AND MY BEAR'...
A FREE C.D. WITH 'MUSIC GAZETTE', AND...
YUK!
WHAT IS IT?
'FROG FANCIER MONTHLY' ?!?...
GWIK! GWIK!
frogtastic!
GWIK! GWIK!
GWIK! GWIK!
GWIK! GWIK!

Internet kills the Entertainment Industry

Ande Morgensen believes that the future of the comics industry is in its own hands...

THE entertainment industry is going through one of its most tumultuous periods and it may emerge as something completely different. Already the music industry is beginning to feel the effects of widespread piracy and yet that specific corner of the entertainment industry is probably to blame for the mess the entire entertainment industry is going to be in. Sony is one of the world's largest record label owners, yet it is also responsible for the production of millions upon millions of blank cassettes and CDs used by the populace to rip them off by making illegal copies of their own products. But of course, what you lose with one hand you gain with the other - and companies don't have to pay the artist when they're selling blank media.

The film industry is also in a state of flux. Cinema attendances are higher now than they have been since the late 1960s. Joe Public and his wife love going to the movies and this is good. But Joe's lazy next door neighbour prefers to watch the big film on the small screen and he doesn't really care if he rents his video or DVD from Blockbuster or buys it from the guy in the local bar who gets hold of those cheap Korean imports a whole six months ahead of the rest of the world.

With the recent news that Utah-based businessman John Dixon is being sued by most of Hollywood's directors because he is distributing (selling and renting) censored versions of their films - and the underlying feeling of US lawyers is that the man might actually win his case - it could be that film makers, like musicians, are rapidly losing control of their output. Dixon established his business by selling copies of James Cameron's *Titanic* with the brief topless scene with Kate Winslet cut out, because the Mormons wanted to see the film but were shocked by this gratuitous piece of sexploitation. He is now producing sanitized versions of just about any film that *might* offend, including a version of *Saving Private Ryan* that makes the landings at Normandy seem like a scene from a Norman Rockwell beach party painting!

Entertainment is being rocked left right and centre and it doesn't really need the Internet – a far more dangerous weapon and one that has enshrined the principle of "borrowing"– to cause it even more grief. Would you rather download the new [insert unknown band name here] album free of charge, or go and spend 20 bucks on it and possibly hate it to pieces? Anyone who uses the file share software program KaZaA.com will know that there are upwards of two million users on-line at any one time, all swapping music, computer games, films and TV shows. In fact they can swap just about anything that can be turned into computer bytes, and this is now costing the entertainment industry even more money. There are many different file share programs available and many millions more utilizing them – and as more and more people get bigger hard drives and faster Internet connections that cost will increase exponentially.

But so what? These fat cats earn mega-bucks anyhow, they won't miss a few bucks here and there… Except it isn't a few bucks here and there any more, and anyone with a rudimentary understanding of economics will know that it won't be the fat cats who lose their jobs as the profit margins continue to drop. Already artists who once upon a time boasted millions of sales are being dropped like hot rocks by their labels and a number of major entertainment companies have downsized and shed small, but significant, numbers of staff.

This problem has only been in existence for about 5 years. It's been there longer, but it's only been in the last few years that technology and cost have started to walk in unison. And there are now enough computer users worldwide to cause serious headaches.

It is not impossible that the entertainment industry, as we know it, may die.

The next major move by the industry will be to try and make the Internet users pay up. But that ability was lost to general commercialism years ago. People expect to pay for nothing except for porn - and in the eyes of most users that's how something like the Internet should be. Restrict the areas that kids can go to, but leave the rest of it as it was intended to be. The Internet has a sort of American free spirit about it, while being morally ambiguous.

So what has this got to do with comicbooks?

Everything. Comics are part of the entertainment industry and are going to be affected by the coming change. In many countries comics will not be affected. Like novels they are difficult to reproduce and distribute freely without considerable work by the pirate. However, more and more comics publishers and creators are using different methods of conveying their stories: comics as web pages, comics as PDF e-books, comics on CD. As soon as they attempt to charge for their product, though - it doesn't matter how much they charge - someone will pirate it and make it freely available. And the Internet is like Hydra; you cut off one head and another ten appear. The comics industry is in far too unhealthy a position to attempt to fight a rearguard action against some young pirate who decides to scan every hot comic that month and offer the jpegs to all and sundry for free! Believe me, you too will read for free if you have the chance.

There will always be the people who are honest and will always pay their money. But how long is it, in a time of high unemployment, before someone who is earning money expresses resentment that his taxes are paying for these "unemployed lazy good-for-nothings"?

Once upon a time, people entertained themselves by sitting round a piano and having a family singsong, or perhaps they'd read from books to each other. Before there was an organised entertainment industry there were just people entertaining other people; and at some point in the future, probably long after we're dead, there won't be an organised entertainment industry because it will impossible to police piracy. There will be the old ways. Comics, provided paper doesn't become too expensive, remain, on the whole, a cheap and cheerful way of getting some entertainment - and will hopefully be one of the old ways that survive.

MILESTONES

Mike Kidson explores key moments in the history of comicbooks

LAST month I argued that historical and pricing classifications in American comics have been blurred and rendered imprecise by the fannish preference for costumed heroes over other comicbook genres. This month I'm going to pursue the theme of fan activity a little further – because I believe it's one of the two key milestones in the development of US comics, right after the 1950s anti-comics campaigns (see *Milestones* in **Borderline #5**).

The main preoccupations of early US fandom were the discovery of the writers and artists who worked on the then generally uncredited comics, the trade and sale of comics in an age when back issue sales were a new concept, and the sharing of appreciation for comics. All three of those preoccupations are still active. Veteran fan Jerry Bails and the many assiduous contributors to the Grand Comic Book Database *(http://www.comics.org/)* continue to do invaluable "grass roots" research into the nuts and bolts creation of American comics. The network of traders and mail order dealers who advertised in fanzines led to the establishment of direct market sales, which provided smaller, more individually tailored ordering facilities to specialist comics shops which were very often owned and run by fans. The article-led fanzines still continue to appear, but some of them also grew to become the professional trade press of American comics.

So fan activity has played a crucial role in the development of US comicbooks during the last forty years. But a considerable price has been paid for its impact on the industry. For one thing, the mainstream comics are now written mostly by fans for fans. The trend towards this began in the early 1970s, when former fans began to enter the industry as creators, and by now it has resulted in endless convolutions of continuity as each new generation of creators revisits and reworks the comics they themselves enjoyed when they were kids. In the long run that cycle will presumably end, since not many kids are reading mainstream US comics any longer. They don't have the exhaustive knowledge of twenty or thirty years' worth of comicbooks required to fully understand what's going on half the time. Only the fans have that kind of knowledge – and one problem is that there aren't that many of them left. So it is that we see publishers singing and dancing about attaining a level of circulation figures on their flagship series that routinely got titles cancelled thirty years ago. Quite simply, the impact of fan creativity on the industry has driven away the casual readers in search of undemanding entertainment, who once supported it in their millions.

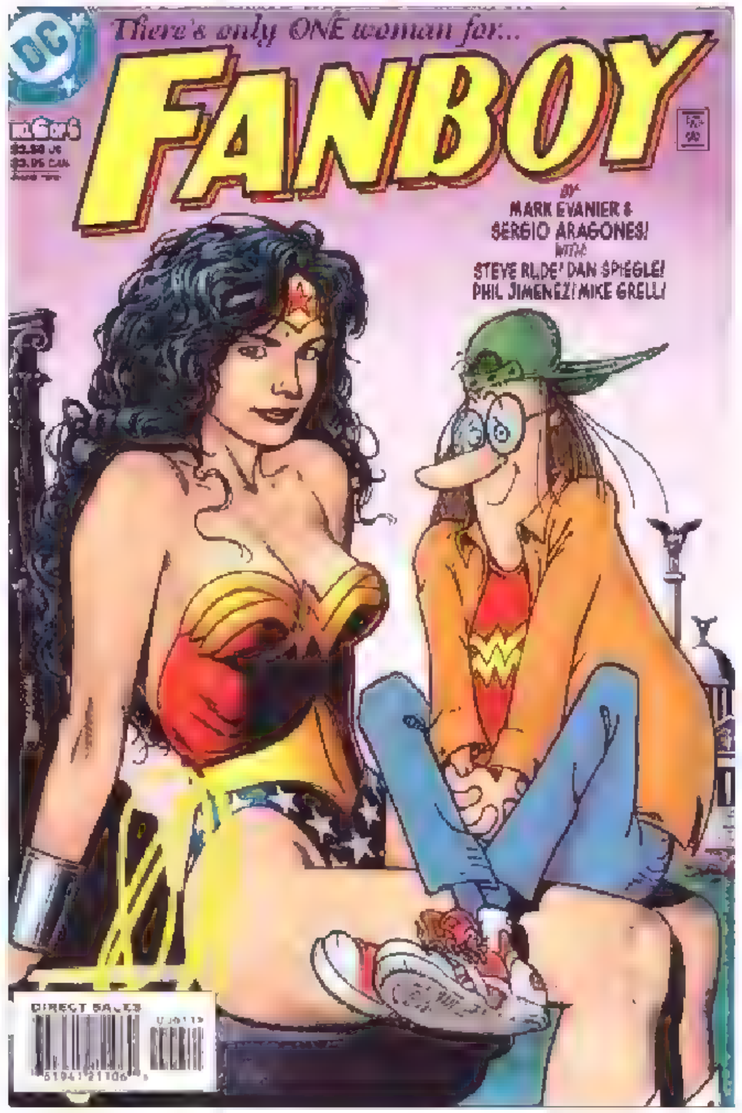
In other media one might perhaps expect to find the trade press offering at least some corrective criticism to counter a trend which has reduced the American comicbook from a popular medium to a minority one. But just as much as the halls of Marvel and DC are walked these days by former fans, so are most trade periodicals run and staffed by them.

Let's pause here for a moment and consider the dictionary definition of a fan. You'll find most dictionaries explain that a fan is an enthusiast, and that the word is an abbreviation of "fanatic". Go a step further and look up "fanatic" - and you'll suddenly find the standard dictionaries bandying around words like "zealot", "unreasonable" and even "insane". "Fan", you may conclude, is not a very flattering term; and it describes a kind of person who can only see one side - the favourable view - of that about which he or she is fanatical.

So it's hardly surprising that the shift from fanzine networks to a fan-organised trade press has led to specialised coverage of comics that is almost always favourable and very rarely even remotely critical. One of the few instances where rigorous criticism has emerged is that of **The Comics Journal**, where editor Gary Groth shifted from mainstream coverage to coverage of the new independent comics which brought new creators into the industry. That shift led to articles which analysed in depth the weaknesses of superhero comics, castigating those who published them and uncritically supported them. It was a bold move; and it drove away a lot of otherwise intelligent, rational fans, many of whom to this day refuse to even consider reading an issue of **TCJ,** or any rigorous criticism of mainstream comicbooks. They're *fans*; although one might argue that criticism could serve a vital role in offering an explanation as to why only fans were buying mainstream comicbooks any longer, the bottom line is that anything less than glowing appreciation of the objects of fannish preoccupation is generally unwelcome, even unthinkable.

And so the American comicbook industry in the year 2002 is mostly run by fans who create fannish material exclusively for a small and declining audience of fans. The fan-dominated trade press is devoted to praising the literary and artistic strip-mining of comicbook continuity by fans turned pro. In the fan communities, any word said against that process of creative recycling is considered a word out of place. What sort of incentive is criticism allowed to offer the industry to try something new and different, or to break out of the limited sales potential of fandom? Less than zero.

Ultimately, the biggest milestones in the history of the American mainstream comicbook measure out nothing more than the route from mass market popularity to niche market obscurity. Such, it seems, may be the tragic legacy of fandom.



A comic written by a fan turned pro, for fans... even *about* fans

EASTERN PROMISES

A change of title but no break in its stride; Kev Hill's monthly survey of what's worthwhile in manga continues!

IN case you haven't been paying attention to what's currently happening in the US-published manga scene, here's a very quick recap: Tokyopop is trying to rule the world. In recent months Tokyopop has taken to publishing a large number of Japanese, and even Korean, comics. Leading this influx is their "100% Authentic" imprint. Making possibly the bravest move in modern comics, Tokyopop has followed the pattern set down by Viz Comics' highly successful Dragon Ball and Dragon Ball Z: Japanese comics in their original form, with artwork and special effects unaltered as much as possible.

There are several reasons for doing this, most notably saving the cost of "flipping" the pages from their original right-to-left format - this often involves reversing individual panels, and re-pasting them in the Western left-to-right format, and it's time-consuming if nothing else. One of the other reasons is respecting the wishes of the original artists. Some don't like the idea of their work being taken apart and presented differently; others do not have such qualms.

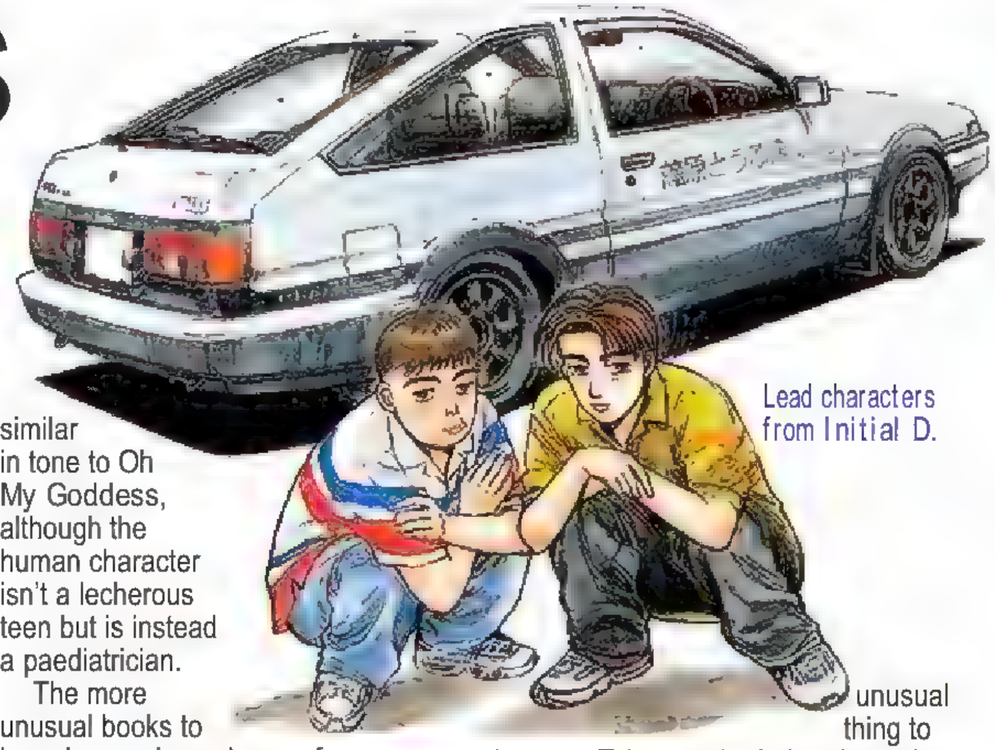
Whatever the reasons, the decision to keep the format, and much of the artwork, of the original comics still leaves Tokyopop with the task of translating and lettering the books. This does, however, mean it is able to produce the books at a startling pace, with some volumes being released almost monthly. With such a hectic release schedule, you might expect the quality of the books to be fairly low - a problem currently plaguing new kid on the publishing block Comics One. This isn't the case, though; we get high quality books with high production values - higher in many cases than those of Tokyopop's chief rivals – so there's no loss there then.

A scene from Marmalade Boy

A little explanation about the quality: most, if not all, Japanese comics are in black and white, with occasional colour pages. This is a result of the weekly and monthly anthology formats they appear in only giving a few colour pages to one story per week/month. US releases tend to retain this black and white format, often turning colour pages to shades of "grey", and then release the collected editions with a colour cover. Tokyopop has taken this concept and expanded on it. Yes, the contents are still black and white, but now they also include colour inserts. This gives a bit more life to the books, and makes them look far more impressive because of it.

Something should be said about the stories themselves. The line-up consists of a decent variety of genres and stories, including some new to the US. Principally, Tokyopop has taken the decision to increase the amount of Studio Clamp's work they're releasing - if you aren't aware of Clamp, seek out back issues of Borderline for information about them.

The first of Clamp's works to be released was Chobits. This tale of a teenager who finds a "persocom" - personal computers shaped like anything you want them to be - is similar in tone to Fujishima Kyousuke's Oh My Goddess, but without that series' rampant magic and motorbikes. Next came Angelic Layer, a kind of Pokemon, with people controlling small doll-like robots in fights. The most recent to appear are the Cardcaptor Sakura sequel Cardcaptor Sakura: Master Of The Clow, and Wish – the latter being also similar in tone to Oh My Goddess, although the human character isn't a lecherous teen but is instead a paediatrician.



Lead characters from Initial D.

The more unusual books to have been released come from a variety of genres. Chief among these is GTO: Great Teacher Onizuka, currently on its sixth volume; a mad-cap story of a young teacher who can't shake his rebellious youth. GTO is rebellious, seemingly unintelligent, and mildly insane. His disaster-laden teaching methods are forced upon the worst of the classes at the school he's employed by, with destruction and humiliation being two of the more common consequences.

Initial D is just for teens, and teenage boys at that - it features that most masculine topic, cars. It's all about boy racers, specifically one: Takumi Fujiwara. Takumi is a star driver, although at first none of his friends realise this. The story follows him and his various battles against other drivers on the treacherous mountain roads of Japan. Be warned, while it's good, it's not riveting stuff unless you like cars.

Another of the unusual moves made by Tokyopop is the number of stories for girls. That may sound like a sexist remark, but with comics being a predominantly male market, it is an unusual thing to happen. Tokyopop had already made a foray into girls comics with the release of their Smile magazine and now, following its success, it has made the obvious step and is releasing separate titles specifically for girls.

These girls' titles are mostly of a romantic bent, but that's not something to be put off by. The story Mars, for example, follows a young shy teenage girl and her almost exact opposite boyfriend, but differs from the usual fare in featuring a lot of talk about motorbikes, a passion of the leading males. Another tale, Marmalade Boy, features the most bizarre set-up: a young girl's parents inform her that they don't love each other anymore, but have fallen for another couple - and so they all want to move in together, bringing the other couple's son along. It's odd, very odd; but well written.

Tokyopop has assembled a fine line-up for its "100% Authentic" imprint, and with more titles to come, it's only going to get better. Add to this its decision to expose the West to some Korean titles, and you begin to realise that Tokyopop is now one of the major players on the comics scene. Seek, read and enjoy.

STILL MIGHTY AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?

With a brief reappearance scheduled for this autumn and a trade collection of the earliest adventures of The Shield already on the shelves, Mike Kidson considers the chequered career of the superhero line every one loves to leave on the shelves…

THE US four colour market may be dominated by superheroics these days – but that doesn't mean that any and all superheroes are assured of success there. Not even ones published by major publishers. Any Anglophone comics fan can name a handful of long underwear types who've been launched by DC or Marvel in a blaze of publicity, only to crash and burn a few month later amid a haze of mediocrity and all round apathy. In fact, **Borderline**'s occasional *Beautiful Losers* column is often devoted to one or more of those characters. Not all losers are beautiful, though – some of them are hideous, and worse, they're persistent, refusing to remain decently dead and buried but coming back from the grave time and time again. Take the Archie/MLJ superheroes (please). They've been trying and failing, over and over again, ever since the early years of American comicbooks! Now, after around fifteen years interred wherever it is the dead superheroes go, they're back, albeit in somewhat zombified form: a brief guest appearance in a giveaway Archie comic this Halloween, a trade collection of some Golden Age not-so-Greats. So we at **Borderline** thought it might be fun to take a look at their ups and downs over the course of more than sixty years. Mostly their downs, since those rather outnumber the ups…

The 1940s, when heroes were heroes and Ratzis weren't!

It all started off looking so good. At the start of 1940 yet another masked man popped up on the stands, on the cover of MLJ's **Pep Comics** #1. Have you heard this one before – scientist invents chemical which will give people superhuman powers, is killed by "foreign agents", his son tries the chemical on himself, dresses up in a snazzy version of the American flag, revenges his dad then continues to fight crime? "Captain America ripoff", do I hear you snarl? Wrong-o, fanboy. Writer Harry Shorten and artist Irv Novick came up with The Shield one year before Joe Simon and Jack Kirby unleashed something very similar… And in that same first issue a snotty newcomer named Jack Cole offered up The Comet – just another spandex guy using his fists on hoodlums, nothing to do with outer space, but never mind the sense, feel the snazzy name. Better yet, check out his unusual demise - in **Pep Comics** #17 he was killed protecting his brother from mobsters. His brother Bob proceeded to take over his strip, but not as The Comet; no, mixing 18th century fashions with spandex trends to scare those famously cowardly and superstitious crooks, Bob carried on as The Hangman.

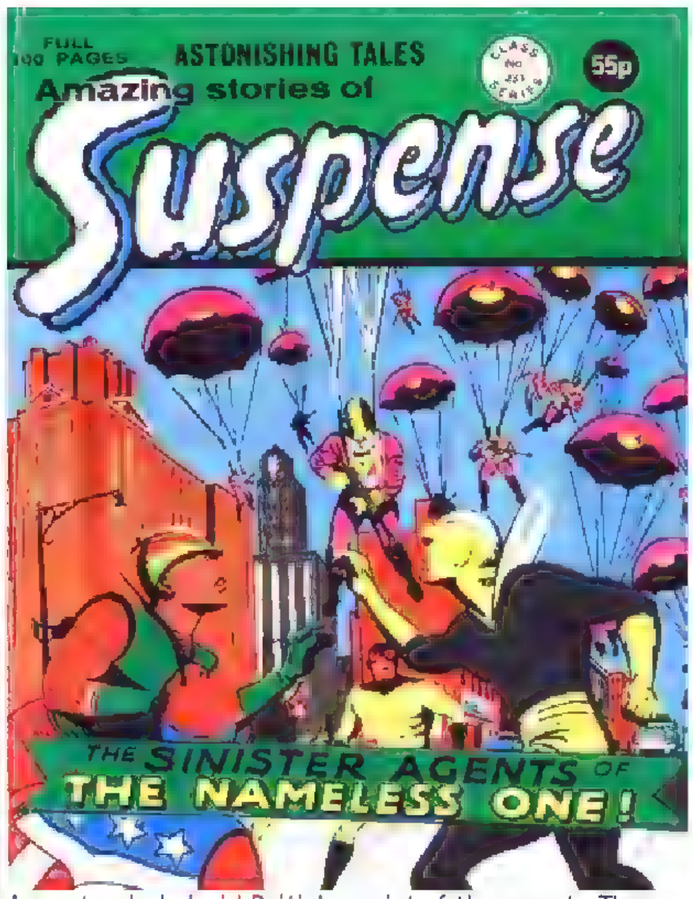
Make no mistake, this was neat stuff. It was original - The Shield may have been the first outright patriotic superhero - and it was innovative. During the war years around twenty more MLJ heroes joined in the Axis-bashing frenzy – the ones to make a note of are The Black Hood (**Top-Notch Comics**), Steel Sterling (star of **Zip Comics**), Mr. Justice, The Web, The Jaguar and The Wizard, but you'll find the full character list at *http://www.mightymlj.com/characters/mlj.html*. The action continued until war's end, and

1959, and even Kirby's art failed to attract the buyers

beyond for some; the '40s were these characters' heyday, and by the end of this piece you might be wishing they'd had the dignity to stay there. But they were already used to adversity and competition - from their own publisher. As early as 1941 publisher John Goldwater (the "J" in MLJ – "M" was Maurice Coyne, "L" was Louis Silberkleit) had lined up an even more innovative concept; a freckle-faced comedy teenage hero intended to provide something for the kids to identify with in between marvelling at the exploits of the costumed guys. Archie Andrews had debuted as a text feature in **Pep Comics** #22, was promptly starred in **Archie Comics**, muscled back in on **Pep**… and by 1945 was close to wiping out his superheroic siblings. What hope did they have when even the company name had been changed to "Archie"?

Flash forward to 1959. DC's

reanimation of numerous Forties superheroes was well under way and seemed to be doing well, so the Archie people opted to do some disinterring too. Being flush with teen humour pencillers but devoid of anyone with recent spandex credits, they hired in one of the great creative teams of American comicbooks, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, to whip up some hits for them. S&K obliged with one new series, **The Fly**, and one DC-style revamp. Tough-talking attorney Tom Troy did well enough with his tight green getup and large, transparent wings, though hooking up with film star sidekick/foil Fly Girl may have been what kept his own title going for 30 issues. Changing his name to Fly-Man was the kiss of death, though



A spectacularly lurid British reprint of the cover to The Mighty Crusaders #5 (1966)

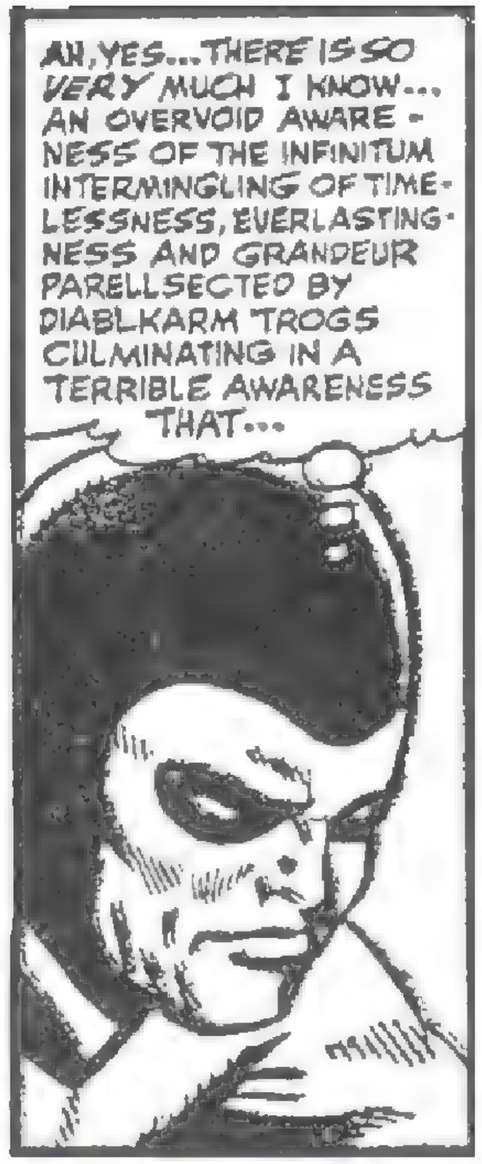
- another 9 issues, then poofff. MLJ also set up The Jaguar, a hero with animal powers - but he soon flopped. The biggest flop, though was S&K's reconstruction of The Shield in **The Double Life of Private Strong**. A capable patriotic type masquerading as a bumbling army private, the new look Shield may have been just a tad too much like their own Captain America for the creators to get too worked up about him, and after just two issues of fine art by Kirby the series bit the dust. S&K parted company, Simon to go into advertising and Kirby to hit the motherlode a couple of years later with writer/editor Stan Lee at a poverty row publisher… but you may have heard that story before.

The point is, superheroes were booming again, MLJ had the distribution, hired the creative talent, gave the reanimation game a shot – but where it worked for others, their characters just didn't have that voodoo that others did so well. Never mind, Bat-fans - along came Adam West and Burt Ward and started the whole thing all over again. Or did they? The *Batman* TV show put spandex on the map of mainstream culture, albeit in a camp vein which DC emulated with obvious reluctance while new-ish superhero kids on the block Marvel Comics simply ignored it. MLJ had no such reservations - but the fact is that they relaunched their ever-hopeful band of superheroes some six months *before* that first airing of the *Batman* show in January 1966. Did they have inside knowledge of what the ABC network had planned for Batman? Were they just uncannily prescient? Were they just uncanny? No matter; back came their lineup of losers, finally grouped together as "The Mighty Crusaders", and writer Jerry Siegel proceeded to take the mickey out of the genre he and Joe Shuster had virtually invented three decades earlier.

The seven issues of **The Mighty Crusaders** are, depending on your perspective, either some of the vilest blots on the superhero escutcheon or irresistibly hilarious. Siegel and editor Richard Goldwater dug deep into the MLJ archives, in a belated flash of logic conjured up The Comet as a science-fiction hero, also called The Black Hood back to life, revamped The Shield yet again and teamed them up with Fly-Man and Fly Girl for a sequence of wacky adventures with cumbersomely "hip" dialogue and stiff, scratchy art, mostly by Paul Reinman.

The peak (or the trough) of the series was certainly the fifth issue. By that time the Batman camp craze was in full stagger, matched by the popularity of TV secret agent show *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.* So Siegel threw elements of both into the fifth issue mix, and notched things up further by revisiting the MLJ archives to revive minor Forties characters in not one, but *two* brand new teams, not so snappily name The Ultra-Men and The Terrific Three. With eleven heroes charging around spouting dumbcracks and volubly expressing lots of character while tangling with the villainous forces of D.E.M.O.N. (c.f. SMERSH, S.P.E.C.T.R.E., T.H.R.U.S.H. Hydra, A.I.M. etc. etc. etc.) on behalf of US secret agency A.U.N.T.I.E. (geddit?), narrative coherence was never going to be a dominant feature of **The Mighty Crusaders** #5, let alone of this sentence. But if the *Batman* show appealed because it was *silly*, the Mighty Crusaders came across as silly *and* incomprehensible - and presumably whatever readers they'd picked up thought so too, since the series was cancelled shortly afterwards. These guys really couldn't go home again – and this time it looked as though they were finally gone for good. Not that many, if any, were shedding tears about it…

For the next seventeen years they slept the sleep of the… let's just say, of the ignored. Times changed. Cheerful, slam-bang character-free action/adventure vanished. Superheroes became tortured, introspective and emotional, as epitomised by Claremont and Byrne's **Uncanny X-Men**. But in the early Eighties the relatively new direct market was spurring fresh publishers into existence; small firms like Americomics, Pacific, Eclipse and First offered creators rights in their creations, attracting disaffected artists like Kirby, Neal Adams, Jim Starlin and Howard Chaykin. The result was a wave of new superhero, and other, titles, threatening to break the DC/Marvel stranglehold on the mainstream. And while Archie Comics wasn't ever about to offer creators ownership of anything, they'd already tried out a few 1970s digest-sized reprints of the '60s stuff - so 1983 must have looked like the right year to try digging up those super-types one more time.


AH, YES... THERE IS SO VERY MUCH I KNOW... AN OVERVOID AWARE-NESS OF THE INFINITUM INTERMINGLING OF TIME-LESSNESS, EVERLASTING-NESS AND GRANDEUR PARELLSECTED BY DIABLKARM TROGS CULMINATING IN A TERRIBLE AWARENESS THAT...
Mr. Justice – and Jerry Siegel – lose the plot...

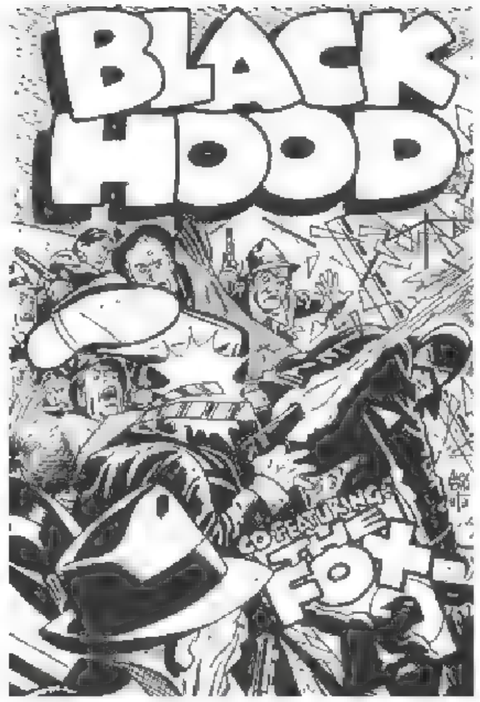
So, into this brave new world emerged, yet again, **The Mighty Crusaders**, with Siegel's Ultra Men and Terrific Three incorporated into their ranks and penciller/editor Rich Buckler at the helm. A slew of other titles re-appeared – **The Fly**, **Steel Sterling**, **The Comet**, **The Original Shield** and **Blue Ribbon Comics** featuring The Black Hood. Veteran artists like Dick Ayers,

Carmine Infantino, Gray Morrow and Alex Toth were hired, alongside newcomers such as Marty Griem and Eduardo Barretto. The result? Irredeemable dullness. Naturally there was some attractive drawing to be seen – but divorced from the Nazi-bashin' exuberance of the Forties or the high octane craziness of the Sixties, the heroes walked like zombies amid convoluted plotlines and struggled with perplexed musings on their fragmented past history. The writers and artists applied the by then standard "Marvel style" of storytelling, but that style had evolved in relation to a body of long-running, ongoing series to which some notion of continuity could be applied. **The Mighty Crusaders** was more a case of *dis*continuity, and they quivered and quaked under the sheer effort required to paste continuity writing onto characters who hadn't even been seen in the shops for the last seventeen years. After a dozen issues of The Mighty Crusaders and a handful of each of the other titles, Archie cancelled the whole deal once more. Can you say "déjà vu"? Sure. I knew you could.

And still they kept on coming back! A plan to relaunch a few of them with mid-80s "grim 'n' gritty" makeovers was, thankfully, shelved, but in 1991 a complete, top to bottom revamping came from a very unlikely source. DC Comics, in one of its rare moments of realising that kids weren't reading comicbooks any more, decided to try wooing them back with a line of superhero books aimed specifically at younger readers – but rather than launching their own new characters, they licenced the MLJ superheroes from Archie and developed them under a new imprint, Impact! Comics. You have to wonder what they were thinking, licencing a set of three time losers… Editor Mike Gold and writers Mark Waid and Brian Augustyn were mainly responsible for the drastic plastic surgery, and regular DC artists such as Rick Burchett, Mike Parobeck, Rags Morales and Tom Lyle were handed the art assignments.

A 1979 herald of the 1980s revival

Impact!



1983, and even Toth's art failed to attract the buyers

Comics retained the old, familiar names, but changed everything else. The Web became not a hero but a worldwide espionage organisation serving as the common element between all the series in the line. The Fly became a teenage student who wasn't called Peter Parker, honest. The Jaguar became a fragile South American girl who transformed into an 8 foot high amazon. The Black Hood became whoever put on a mystical balaclava at any given time. And so on. Good thinking? Better than just another revival of the old crowd, surely, and some of the titles, notably Bill Messner-Loebs' **The Jaguar**, offered the best treatments these old lags had ever been given since the 1940s. But there was one big snag - by 1991 there *were* no young readers left to be attracted, and to the adult fans just weren't buying this seemingly simplistic and too juvenile stuff. One guess what happened… That's right – another year or so's worth of titles followed by a swift return to oblivion.

But by now the superhero mainstream is dominated by fan creators – and even the Archie superheroes have fans. Paul Castiglia has been working as an editor and writer for Archie Comics since 1990, and has long planned to bring the Mighty Crusaders back into the picture somehow. Practically speaking, "somehow" means "in the pages of the regular Archie titles", so when Castiglia finally managed to write a handful of the MLJ super-types into an issue of **Archie's Weird Mysteries** in autumn 1999, the emphasis was on humour - the characters materialised from a comic being read by Archie Andrews. Since then Castiglia has continued to keep the spandex veterans paraded in front of the readers via public service advert pages. Most recently he's written a whole stack of the Crusaders into a free minicomic being produced by Archie as a promo item for distribution in US comic shops at the end of this month. Apparently the stories tell of Archie, Jughead and co. going to see a (fictitious) Shield movie which has cameo appearances by The Mighty Crusaders… as a fiction within a fiction within a fiction! Castiglia is eager to see a new **Crusaders** series launched and has long been working on a proposal for one, but meanwhile metafictional and promotional appearances are all that's left for the MLJ heroes. Well, that and the ever-burgeoning market for Golden Age goodies; the re-publishing of The Shield's earliest **Pep Comics** stories last month more or less brings this story back to its beginning.

All sneering - and any sentimentality - aside, trademark-protected, corporate-owned characters will always make occasional comebacks; if not, anyone could start using them. They may have flopped even at the most auspicious times for superhero revivals, they may now be nothing more than bit players in the funny pages - but any pronouncement that MLJ's eternal superhero failures are finally extinct would, without doubt, be premature…

1991, and even Bill Sienkiewicz's hip and trendy art failed to attr… oh, you get the drift

12 O'CLOCK LOCK

This month Selina Lock dwells on how comics have treated those staples of childhood... fairy tales.

CREATIVE pursuits often involve looking at past works of art and using them as inspiration. At best, this can lead to creations that surpass the original, or at worst, to derivative tripe. Comics are no different, and many have taken inspiration from myths, legends, life and other works of fiction. This month I've been musing on what comics have done with the likes of Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and the Three Little Pigs. I mean, if Disney can make a fortune from them and Tom Holt can create comedy worlds populated with them, then why shouldn't comics add their own unique slant to the legacy of The Brothers Grimm?

The main reason I was deliberating this question was that I've just finished reading the first 5-part story arc of **Fables**, written by Bill Willingham and published by Vertigo. Having read some of Willingham's previous work in **Coventry**, **The Dreaming**, and **The Sandman Presents**, I was intrigued to see what he would do with such well-known folk tales. I can truly say that he did things with them that I wouldn't have been able to guess at! **Fables** sees the characters from the lands of Fairy and make-believe living in latter-day New York City in hiding from the Adversary that has overrun their homelands, and trying to protect their true identities from the "mundanes" whose city they share.

Fables cover art by James Jean

From this premise I was expecting to see stories about how the characters fled their lands, their struggles to keep their identities secret and plans of how to regain their lost homes. However, what we actually get is a good old-fashioned murder mystery, ending with the obligatory parlour scene. The murder victim is Rose Red, sister to Snow White, who is currently the Fable community's Deputy Mayor; the investigating officer is Bigby (the Big Bad) Wolf, and prime suspects are Jack the Giant Killer and notorious wife-murderer Bluebeard.

The murder mystery plot keeps the comic moving along nicely while also concentrating on developing the characters of Bigby and Snow White beyond what our childhood memories of them might be. Willingham manages to evolve the character of Snow White in quite a believable manner. I mean, I can imagine someone who had to organise a household for seven dwarves doing a good job of running a community. She does come across as a much harder character than her Disney incarnation, but the background detail of her ex-husband's infidelity accounts for that hardness. It never occurred to me that the Prince Charming that married Snow White might be the same one that also married Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella.

Whereas, when I think which fairy tale character I would recast as a down-at-heel detective, the Big Bad Wolf is not one that springs to mind. Willingham deliberately casts against type, painting Bigby as the model of reform; we even see one of the three little pigs crashing on his couch, guilt-tripping him for blowing his house down. Willingham's wolf is a shape-shifter, living as a human and only reverting to his true form in times of stress, suggesting that his disguise in Little Red Riding Hood was more sophisticated than just putting on Granny's nightshirt.

The version of Jack the Giant Killer seen in **Fables** can easily be related back to the one we see in Jack and the Beanstalk. He's still a daydreaming layabout, forever chasing the next get-rich-quick scheme. It's more difficult to comment on whether the morally ambiguous Bluebeard has truly repented his past. He seems to have stopped killing wives, but remains a sinister figure.

Another comic that takes the thrust of its inspiration from folklore is **Castle Waiting** by Linda Medley. There are currently two **Castle Waiting** collections: **The Curse of Brambly Hedge**, **The Lucky Road**, and the continuing series from Medley's Olio Press imprint. Of the two books, **The Curse of Brambly Hedge** is a more traditional re-telling of the Sleeping Beauty tale, but told from the perspective of the Princess' loyal ladies-in-waiting, who are slightly displeased when she buggers off with her handsome prince, leaving them behind.

Fables interior by Lan Medina & Steve Leialoha

Brambly Hedge is entertaining enough, and gives some nice background to the world of **Castle Waiting**, but I feel that the stories really come alive with the **Lucky Road** storyline. **The Lucky Road** trade paperback mingles Medley's original characters with the ideas and settings that generally populate fairytales, taking the whole thing into new territories.

Fables and **Castle Waiting** both tackle the subject of fairy tales, but with entirely different, though no less satisfying, results. It has been said that superheroics are the folk tales of the modern age. These two books prove that there's still life in the old dogs yet.

12 O'Clock Lock will return in Doctor No.

COMICS 2002

OH DEAR. OH GOOD GOD. OH NO.

WHAT IS IT, BILL?

IT'S THE RELAUNCH ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR ... IT REALLY IS VERY BAD.

DAMN! AND I'VE PAID THE WRITER AND ARTIST A YEAR IN ADVANCE TO SAVE MONEY! WHAT ARE WE GONNA DO?

I'LL BE TOO EMBARRASSED TO SELL IT FOR ANY MORE THAN IT'S WORTH, WHICH IS, I DONNO, ABOUT NINE CENTS.

THEN WHY NOT SELL IT FOR NINE CENTS, TRUE BELIEVER? TELL ALL THE MERRY MARCHIN' MARVELITES THAT IT'S A PROMOTIONAL ISSUE! STATISTICS PROVE THAT THE AVERAGE COMIC READER WILL NOT REALISE HOW BAD IT IS FOR AT LEAST A YEAR. BY WHICH POINT THE TITLE CAN BE RELAUNCHED AGAIN WITH A DIFFERENT CREATIVE TEAM!

MAKE IT SO, NUMBER ONE.

EXCELSIOR!

THREE MONTHS LATER, IN A COMIC SHOP IN THE UK—

BLOODY HELL! IT'S THEM AGAIN!

HAVE YOU GOT THE NINECENTS ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR YET?

YES. IT'S ON THE SHELF.

CAN I HAVE A LOOK THROUGH THAT BOX?

WHAT BOX?

THAT BOX, THERE. BEHIND THE T-SHIRT RACK.

IT'S FULL OF COMICS I TOOK OFF THE SHELVES THIS MORNING TO MAKE SPACE FOR TODAY'S DELIVERY!

I STILL WANT TO LOOK THROUGH IT.

THERE'S NOTHING IN THERE YOU'VE NOT SEEN BEFORE! YOU GUYS WERE IN HERE YESTERDAY COMPLAINING ABOUT THOSE COMICS BEING ON THE SHELVES INSTEAD OF NEW ONES!

I STILL WANT TO LOOK THROUGH IT.

ACTION FIGURES? TRADING CARDS? ICE HOCKEY TOPS?

ROLE PLAYING GAMES? I THOUGHT THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A COMIC SHOP!

IF I ONLY SOLD COMICS THEN I'D BE OUT OF WORK TOMORROW!

NO! IF YOU SOLD A MORE DIVERSE RANGE OF TITLES INCLUDING STUFF PUBLISHED BY ONI, FANTAGRAPHICS AND TOP SHELF THEN YOU'D MAKE MORE MONEY!

MY KNEES ARE TOO ARTHRITIC TO GET ME TO THE BOX. CAN YOU LIFT IT OUT FOR ME, PLEASE?

BLOODY HELL!

WHY ARE YOU GUYS IN HERE EVERY DAY? I THOUGHT THAT WHEN YOU RETIRED YOU SPENT YOUR DAYS IN GARDEN CENTRES AND TEA ROOMS

WHY IS THE NINECENTS ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR TWENTY PEE WHEN A TWO DOLLAR COMIC IS ONE POUND FIFTY? SURELY, THIS SHOULD BE NO MORE THAN FIVE PEE?

UNFORTUNATELY, AMERICA IS A LONG WAY AWAY AND WE WERE STILL CHARGED FOR FREIGHT

THIS IS AN OUTRAGE!

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS? HE'S CHARGING TWENTY PEE FOR THE NINE CENTS ISSUE OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR!

THAT'S NOT RIGHT! IT SHOULDN'T BE MORE THAN FIVE PEE!

SAY 'NO' TO RIP OFF BRITAIN!

THIS BOX IS RUBBISH! IT'S JUST FULL OF TIRED OLD COMICS THAT HAVE BEEN ON THE SHELVES FOR WEEKS!

I'LL JUST HAVE THIS TODAY, THEN.

THAT'S ER... TWENTY PEE.

CAN I PAY BY CREDIT CARD?

FOR GOD'S SAKE! JUST TAKE IT! TAKE IT AND GET OUT OF HERE!

THE VERDICT

COMICS REVIEWS

Borderline's policy is that we don't mark a comic out of ten or some other archaic method of rating. A single comic or a series should be judged on a number of things, therefore we encourage our reviewers to make a judgement about a specific issue. This is why **Borderline**'s review column is the best and fairest in comics!

THIS MONTH'S JURY:

David R. Booth (DRB)
Andrew Cheverton (AC)
Jay Eales (JE)
Kelvin Green (KG)
Phil Hall (PH)
Rol Hirst (RH)
Mike Kidson (MK)
Selina Lock (SL)
Steve Miller (SM)
Martin Shipp (MS)
Andy Winter (AW)

Have you got a book that requires a Verdict? Then send it to **Borderline** (details on page 2) Have you got a Verdict on a book? Yes? Then **Borderline** wants you! Contact Andy Winter: reviews@borderline.mediahall.co.uk for reviewing details.

Amazing Spider-Man #44
By J. Michael Straczynski and John Romita Jr.
Marvel Comics

Doctor Octopus Classic vs. New Doctor Octopus. After the good, hard, much-needed kick up the jacksie that Straczynski gave this book when he joined it, things seem to be coasting a little. There isn't that "what the heck happens next?" feeling, and the cute dialogue and comedy set-ups seem just a little forced. It's still head and shoulders above every other Marvel superhero comic at the moment, but even the slightest drop in quality disappoints.

What's fascinating is John Romita Jr.'s gradual move towards a mixture of Schulz-like simplicity and Picasso-like abstractionism as far as the human face is concerned. Eyes are no longer necessarily on the same level, mouths are slowly migrating to new positions on the side of the face, Mary Jane Watson-Parker's head grows ever more spherical. And is it just me, or does Peter Parker, in the right light, look just like famed miserablist Morrissey?

The Verdict: Hugely enjoyable superhero stuff, but needs a slightly larger font size on that lower-case lettering Marvel have let pervade all their books. (MS)

Avengers #57
By Geoff Johns and Kieron Dwyer
Marvel Comics

It's a new beginning for the Avengers, courtesy of JSA's Geoff Johns. Johns' writing is considerably different from Kurt Busiek's, especially in the way that he makes these superheroes sound so natural. Whereas Busiek wrote some good dialogue, it was mostly "shop talk"; but Johns has the Avengers talk about the things you'd expect them, as human beings, to talk about. So, we get a scene between Cap'n Yankee and Falcon that is essentially about them asking each other if they did anything interesting this weekend, whilst bounding across the New York skyline. This works much better than it sounds and actually gives the Avengers a human side, an achievement in a team book, where individual characterisation is usually lacking.

Plot-wise Johns is also doing a decent job, although it is also here that his problems arise. He gives us an effectively enigmatic Scarlet Witch subplot to counterbalance the bigger events elsewhere, which themselves send out a strong statement of how exactly Johns will be handling this book. Unfortunately, that may cause him trouble down the road. Firstly, he seems to be heading for some kind of new take on the Authority-style concept of superheroes running the world. Although the set-up for this works well, with the Avengers very reluctantly taking on the responsibility, it is hard to see where Johns can take the idea in the three issues he has for the storyline. Secondly, as others have commented, he appears to be writing this like it's the JLA, following Busiek's epic storyline with another story full of earth-shattering events. Where this title differs from JLA and similar titles, and improves on them, is in its focus on individuals rather than big-budget pyrotechnics. Johns seems to be attempting to do both here, and I'm not sure the mix works. Perhaps an issue or two of minor events interspersed with some talking heads would have worked better than this immediate lurch into yet more world saving.

The art team produce much better art than they ever did under Busiek, which is something of a puzzle. This is the best looking issue they've done since they came on board, although Captain America still looks like he's about 65, and Iron Man still appears to be struggling with constipation.

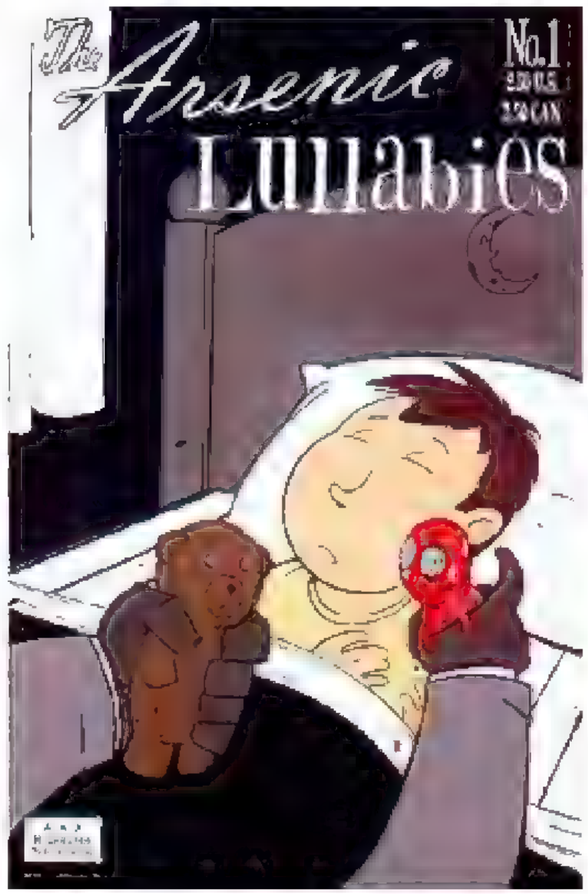
The Verdict: A strong start for new writer Geoff Johns, with only a few minor problems and a hint of future difficulties. (KG)

The Arsenic Lullabies #1
By Douglas Paszkiewicz
AAA Milwaukee Publishing

In today's current political climate, some might question the sense in producing a comic poking fun at anthrax terrorists, abortion, Hiroshima and child molestation. I wouldn't, because this is not only a very *funny* comic, but it is done with intent and with the kind of implicit background knowledge that differentiates satire from cheap jibes.

I've not read any Arsenic Lullabies before (a trade collecting the original Arsenic Lullaby series is available) and I'm sorry that I've missed it. Paszkiewicz has a clear and expressive drawing style that communicates the emotion in his tales earnestly, while the stories are sharp and direct, causing laughter in subjects that you're used to not laughing about because of their inherent awfulness. But I laughed like a drain throughout most of this issue.

The Verdict: More assured than Angry Youth Comix, more risqué than Deep Fried and more intelligently planned than either. (AC)



Avengers United #18
By Various
Panini Comics/Marvel UK

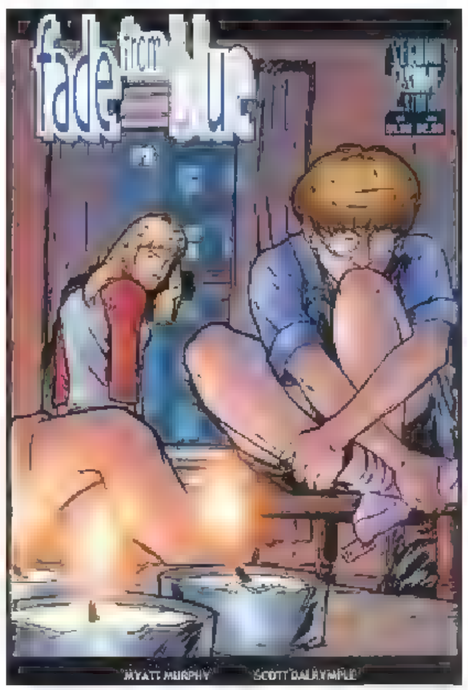
With Carlos Pacheco drawing the main feature and John Buscema's work in the classic reprint, this comic couldn't look much better. The writing is also on top form, with Kurt Busiek's finest Avengers work in the superb Avengers Forever coupled with Roy Thomas' enthusiastic and dramatic account of the marriage between the Wasp and Yellowjacket. Both stories are entertaining reads, making this anthology great value for money. The coupling of a modern strip with a classic strip usually makes the classic strip look unsophisticated and crude in its execution, but this month's flashback stands up well, perfectly meshing comedy and drama in an exciting tale.
The Verdict: One of the best value and best quality comics you can get anywhere. (KG)

Fade From Blue #3
Murphy & Dalrymple
Second2Some Studios

The plot thickens but not before we get to see some exploration into how the girls all came to be together. This is as close to an origin issue as you'll find. We also go through the process of She-Sa's first proper date and Christa's insistence that men are nothing but trouble (but she would with a contact note from the local pox clinic). And Marit decides to take positive action and contacts "uncle", which no doubt will lead us into a very interesting fourth issue.

I can't help being impressed by this comic. Low cover price, good artwork, excellent script. It's no surprise that the review copy arrived with many cuttings and evidence of praise from the rest of the industry. If you're looking for something different, look no further.

The Verdict: I hope *your* father isn't a philandering spy. (DRB)



A Fine Mess #1
By Matt Madden
Alternative Comics

Matt Madden wrote and drew *Aranda's Coat* for the Expo 2001 anthology, which was reason enough for my buying this: ironically, that story is possibly the least of the works on offer here. In a mixture of one-page strips and longer pieces Madden shows versatility in both pathos and humour, as well as a pleasing combination of artistic styles, each employed to their best effect within the framework of the story each is required to illustrate.

The longest section is *Night of the Grossinator*, printed in a two-colour process using purple and yellow and telling the tale of Guard Tindell, who is having a celebratory evening as a precursor to his leaving town. It's an absolutely accomplished piece of storytelling, using a third person narrative device to great effect as we follow a likeably flawed character through the events of an evening.

The rear of the comic features *Exercises in Style*, which focuses on a simple incident told and retold from different viewpoints and in different genres and drawing styles; everything from detective and cartoon strips to photo comics offers diverse takes on a simple scene, breaking it down and reinterpreting it each time.

The Verdict: A superb selection of work, showcasing an impressive range of disciplines from one creator. (AC)

Happy Endings
By Various
Dark Horse Maverick

A good idea this: a themed anthology paperback from a varied list of comics talent and Frank Miller. It is also a difficult collection to pull real gems from, as the quality control is strictly set to a high standard. (And Frank Miller.)

Sam Kieth offers a wonderfully told apologia from Mr Gone, mixed with Kieth's normal neurotic reticence and an anecdote about his first meeting with Bob Schreck; it's easily the best part of the book, although Bernie Mireault comes a very close second with a neatly rendered tale of love, cats and awkward mothers-in-law. Bendis uses up a couple of pages talking about his favourite subject; Mike Mignola illustrates a sweet story from his eight-year-old daughter Katie; and Jim Mahfood tells another tale of the *Grrl Scouts*.

Away from the more usual suspects (and Frank Miller) we have good work from relative newcomers Craig Thompson, Jason Hall and Matt Kindt, and Farel Dalrymple, all of whom should relish a larger exposure for their work. Everybody seems to have put a lot into this, with all of the idiosyncrasies of each creator's work intact and shown to best effect.

But... Frank Miller. While it quite plainly hasn't been Frank's year (in critical terms, of course - I'm sure that, financially at least, Frank thinks he's had a corker of a year), this is really beyond a joke. Never mind his single image "Happy Ending" efforts that range from the dubious taste of a baby holding a gun to his chin and a toddler about to stick a fork into an electrical socket to the casual sexism that passes for feminism in Frank's world. But whatever attempt at comment his *Aryan Race* page was meant to be is lost in over-egged prose that leads around in circles until one can't be sure what point is intended. Maybe the point is that Frank Miller can't write using long words. But an image of a swastika-wearing Nazi Superman rising high above a swarm of whiskered, large nosed assailants possibly says more than a thousand words; even long ones. And I'm falling short of accusing Miller here; because I can't for the life of me decide what he's trying to say, and because his prose is three times longer than it needs to be, full of alliteration and things sentences are meant to do before they fall apart.

And a final note to Miller: if you're going to complain that Tim Sale and Scott McDaniel ripped your art style off, maybe you'd like to name-check Steranko before swiping one of his most famous images wholesale. Or maybe Steranko refused to allow his name on the work.

The Verdict: A wonderfully selected collection from the brightest stars of this sort of comics. And Frank Miller. (AC)

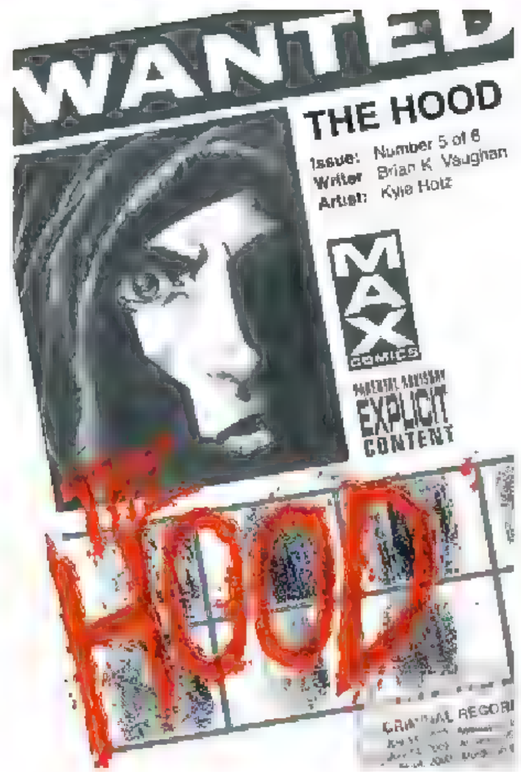
The Hood #5
By Brian K. Vaughn and Kyle Hotz
Marvel MAX Comics

Writer Vaughn may not have enjoyed critical plaudits or even decent sales when he was responsible for the umpteenth re-launch of Swamp Thing a few years back, but it seems she's struck gold with his two latest projects. Y: The Last Man is going great guns over at Vertigo and this six issue miniseries is probably the best title yet from Marvel's otherwise disappointing MAX imprint.

The Hood is an enjoyably foul-mouthed urban tale about a small time crook – Parker Robins – given super powers whenever he dons the cloak and boots of a strange creature he killed during an attempted warehouse robbery. Despite its subject matter, The Hood is both funny and human, while Vaughn has also avoided the obvious temptation to turn his main character into a "misunderstood good guy". Robins is a foolish, childish man for whom great power doesn't mean great responsibility but rather the chance to become embroiled in an ill-advised diamond heist. He cheats on his pregnant girlfriend, accidentally shoots a cop and only escapes the reader's total opprobrium because he isn't quite as bad as the other lowlifes he associates and squabbles with. To make him in any way sympathetic is quite a feat on Vaughn's part, although you can't shake the feeling that next month's finale is going to end in tears.

The claustrophobic atmosphere of The Hood is considerably enhanced by Kyle Hotz' moody pencils and unusual approach to figure work - all his characters seemingly hollow eyed, gangly and not quite of this world. Meanwhile, the contributions of inker Eric Powell and colourist Brian Haberlin add to the down at heel, shadowy nature of the book's protagonists and settings. The Hood's is a muted, malevolent world bereft of hope, and it's captured here in all its grimy, gritty glory.

The Verdict: An undeservingly underrated title from an undeservingly underrated writer. You really should be buying this, you know. (AW)



The Filth #4
By Grant Morrison and Chris Weston
DC/Vertigo

I've given up trying to work out what the point of this series is. Indeed, I'm no longer sure that there is one. Yet it doesn't matter, as on the level of an episodic but unconventional police-type series it works very well. The Filth is never less than entertaining, with cracking writing and great ideas from Morrison, and a pleasingly unconventional yet attractive art style. Viewed as a whole it might make more sense but reading it episode by episode is great fun. This comic is proof, if any were needed, that comics are a good home for science fiction stories.
The Verdict: A clever and entertaining science fiction comic put together by inspired creators. (KG)

Hellblazer #175
By Mike Carey and Steve Dillon
DC/Vertigo

Has anybody else noticed that the Vertigo cover redesign has dropped the currency denomination? That "2.50" could be dollars, Euros, yen, dong, anything you or your comics dealer likes.

Anyway: Constantine is back in England, back in Liverpool, back in trouble and back in the hands of British creators. It's too early to state that Mike Carey's work will be superior to the mess that came immediately prior to this, but by God it had better be. There's an unwelcome third-person narration that could wear thin pretty quickly; Jimmy Palmiotti's inks give Steve Dillon's pencils a faint sheen and a different weight of line, making the visuals strangely reminiscent of Dave Gibbons' work. What's worrying about this return to roots is that so far it's exactly that; this issue could be from any run from the last 14-odd years. Exemplary depiction of a reef knot, though.
The Verdict: Good to have the old sod home. Let's hope the welcome doesn't wear off. (MS)

Judge Dredd Megazine #4.15
By Various
Rebellion

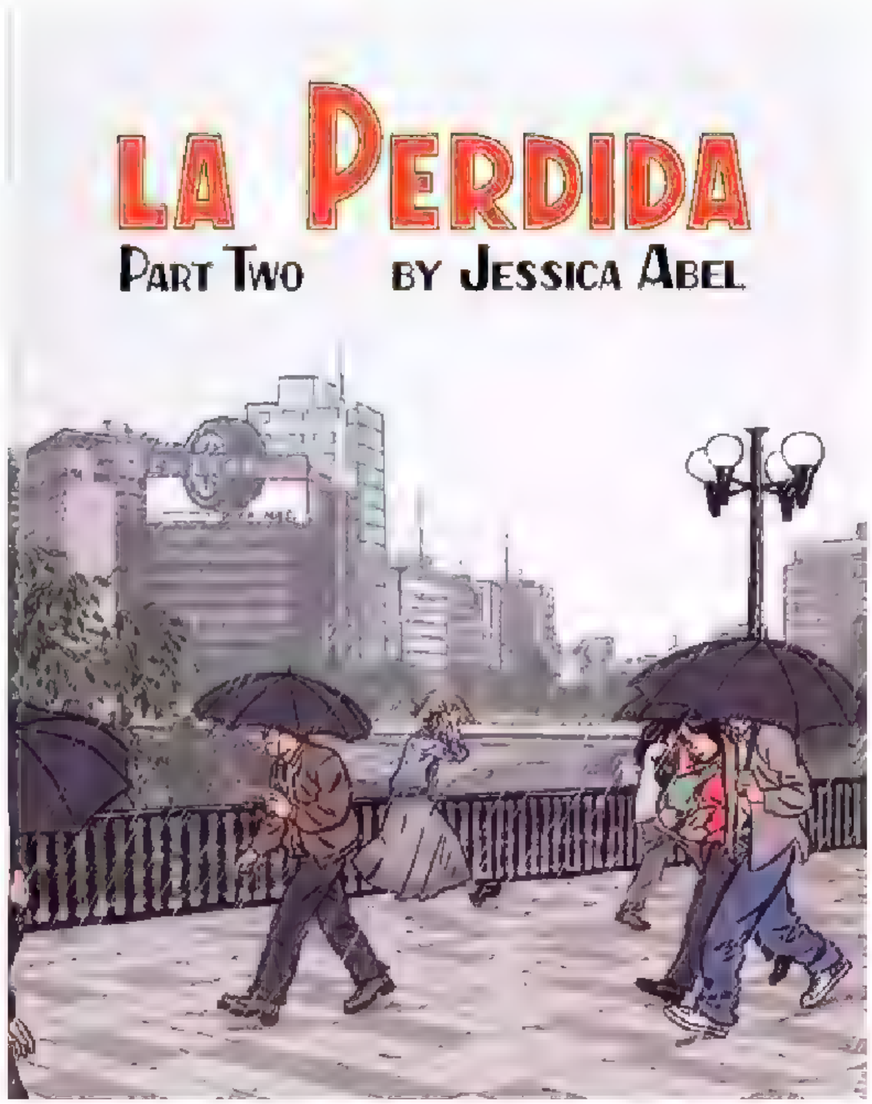
Another gorgeous *Durham Red* cover, but this time the story inside matches up in terms of quality - Red meets Dracula in a poignant and eerie tale written by Dan Abnett, with amazing retro-European-style art from Enric Romero. *The Bendatti Vendetta* is grating, with little other than John Burns' unique art justifying its existence. *Lenny Zero* comes to a quiet end, seeming more like an overextended *Future Shock* with good art than anything else. *Bad Company* comes to an interesting if under-whelming end, and a number of engaging *Bad Company*-related extras are reprinted alongside the main strip, including the "pilot" episode from the never-printed Judge Dredd Fortnightly. The *Judge Dredd* strip has all the appearance of trying to say something important but fails, ending up as yet another dull tale from Mega City One. Finally, David Bishop's history of 2000AD continues in an entertaining and interesting fashion, although it is becoming clear that his inability to get certain important creators to contribute has harmed this feature.

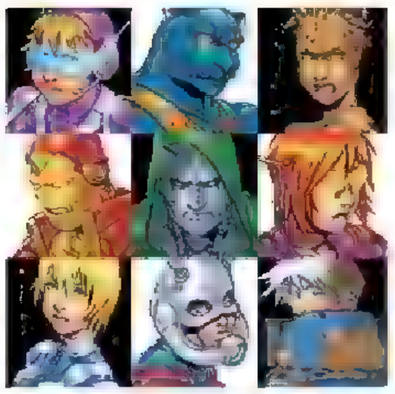
All in all, an average issue with some nice visuals, but little else to recommend it.
The Verdict: Only just worth the money this month. (KG)

La Perdida #2
By Jessica Abel
Fantagraphics

Autobiography in disguise, or not? It's impossible to say; Abel moved to Mexico around the time that her protagonist Carla is described as having done the same, and the subtextual narrative concerns an American woman's earnest yet slightly uneasy attempts to become part of a culture which is weighted with both envy and disdain for that of its massive neighbouring country. So it's at least likely that she's drawing on personal experience here; but it's uncertain to what extent.

To the reader, it perhaps doesn't matter. The theme of personal alienation amid foreign climes is a tried and tested one, and Abel does a good, restrained job of keeping it running constantly in the background yet bringing it forward to dominate events at key moments of crisis. Above and beyond that she tells a story of tangled interpersonal relations and common joys and irritations which could, in effect, be set anywhere; and that is either La Perdida's weakness or its greatest strength. Viewed as an account of an American adjusting to life in Mexico, it has a curious lack of local colour, for which no amount of Spanish slang with translation footnotes can really substitute. If it is seen as a universal account of alienation to which the Mexican setting is fundamentally irrelevant, though, it works very well. Abel's somewhat scratchy line cartoons nuances of expression and reaction with great range and subtlety, establishing a rich vocabulary of shifting allegiances and uncertainties which speaks far louder than the often harsh, strident dialogue.
The Verdict: Passion constantly seethes beneath the cool, seemingly artless surface of this complex account of being a stranger in a strange land. (MK)





Marvel Mangaverse #6
By Ben Dunn and Kevin Gunstone
Marvel

The series ends on a disappointing note as, rather predictably, the villain is defeated and everyone makes friends. All the interesting possibilities of previous issues are sidestepped in favour of a conventional heroic ending, which seems rather rushed. The writing seems rather shallow and superficial and even the art seems tired. The storyline was always intended to run for six episodes, so the apparently rushed and half-hearted resolution is all the more puzzling. This was one of Marvel's most promising series when it began, making this limp conclusion very disappointing indeed.
The Verdict: A sadly under-whelming ending to a promising series. (KG)

Peter Parker, Spider-Man #47
By Paul Jenkins, Humberto Ramos and Wayne Faucher
Marvel Comics

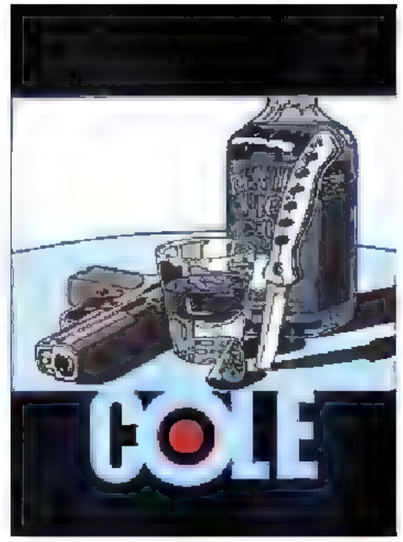
It almost makes you long for the days when they solved the problem of Norman Osborn knowing Peter's identity with the old madness-induced amnesia chestnut. Not that Paul Jenkins doesn't *try* to convince us with his psychological stalemate option (Norman threatens to kill everyone Spidey loves in order to drive him over the edge and make Pete just as nutty as him - Pete calls his bluff by refusing to give into hate no matter what Norman does)... but it doesn't really stand up.

"I won't have to kill you in return," Pete says, "I won't even have to send you to jail. Just being you - that's life without parole." Well, it's a nice speech... but are we really to believe that Pete would just leave Norman to toddle off home after that, and that Norman, beaten by the power of Pete's resolve, would just abandon his uber-baddiness to despair (especially when Pete taunts him again in the closing pages)? Sorry, Paul... it just doesn't ring true. Shame - this was a pretty good Goblin story till then.

Meanwhile, Humberto Ramos' all-angles art could go either way. He's great at drama - drenching thunderstorms and punches that you can feel coming out of the page at you - but maybe he needs to pull back a little from caricature in the quieter scenes.
The Verdict: An unconvincing resolution to an otherwise exciting story. (RH)

100 Bullets #38
By Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso
Vertigo

Very little happens. People speak in "realistic" dialects with the occasional *really* badly placed emphasis. There is some swearing and some silence. It's another issue of 100 Bullets. That's about all.
The Verdict: Will you please just get *on* with it? (MS)



Rover #1
By Michael Foran
Monkeysuit Press

The two things that come first to mind when reading this are Jeff Smith's Bone and the Nintendo game *Pikmin*. This entirely wordless tale of an alien probe robot befriended by an indigenous alien on a strange and unusual planet, the two working to save each other from predators, is at once sweet and perfectly told, with honest humour and the kind of authorial indulgence that is often mistaken for juvenilia.

Foran has a completely clean style of cartooning, able to fit up to fifteen panels to a page without once losing the pace or rendering the art murky, and his device of using longer panels at the bottom of the page that are part of an overall background to the rest of the panels serves to break each page up into its own time and space, while also leaving a pause before the next page begins.

In complete contrast, the backup strip, *Golem*, is a lushly pencilled endeavour that captures an O. Henry feel in its macabre Victorian tale of spooky dolls and stern governesses.
The Verdict: Two examples of an undoubted new talent, capable of extremes in his work and worth keeping an eye out for. (AC)

Transformers Generation One 5
By Chris Sarracini and Pat Lee
Dreamwave Productions

Anyone still harping on about the "attractive" art on this series should have a look at a particularly shoddy battle sequence in this issue between Optimus Prime and Devastator. Given that Pat Lee's covers are quite splendid, it is rather surprising that the internal pages are so badly drawn. In terms of writing, it seems from this issue that Chris Sarracini is trying to do better, as he makes a rather late attempt at coherent characterisation. However, the attempt is hindered by some outrageously loose plotting, and bad pacing throughout. As a result, this comic approaches the end of its first volume leaving a definite impression that it is becoming a rather embarrassing mess.
The Verdict: Avoid. Then avoid some more. Then avoid again. This is one of the worst comics ever. (KG)

Teenagers From Mars # 3
By Rick Spears & Rob G
Teenagers From Mars

It's difficult to properly review this as I haven't read the earlier issues and they seem somewhat hard to find, but it's safe to say that this - like XXX Live Nude Girls - is a comic that defies the expectations of its title.

Mars is a small town somewhere in America, and this comic is about the teenagers that live there. Although not the science fiction comic that the title may indicate, there is a thread of weirdness running throughout; like *Twin Peaks* without the mystery and Strangehaven without the Englishness.

Spears' script is very sharp and flows wonderfully around his cast, with the effect that I could get right into this on only reading the third issue: there are a dozen writers at DC who can't do that on their best day. Rob G has a basic, scratchy style of drawing, though his figures are all individual and beautifully expressive. What he may lack in pen work, he more than makes up for with digitally shaded grey tones that help the art enormously.

Altogether this is an impressive collaboration between two creators who have put together an excellent American version of Gary Spencer Millidge's Strangehaven, without cribbing from it but substituting for all of the English eccentricities and mores, recognisably American ones.

The Verdict: Enthusiastically recommended, providing you can find a bloody copy. (AC)

Transformers Armada #2
By Chris Sarracini and James Raiz
Dreamwave Productions

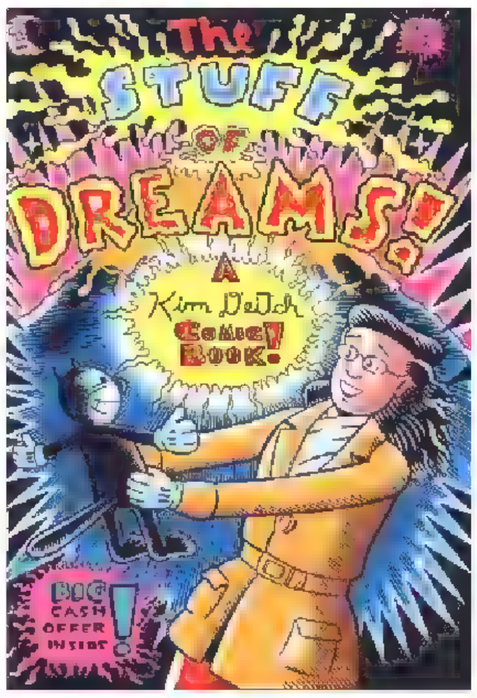
This title continues to impress as it creates a whole new chapter of the Transformers mythos. Sarracini writes a good script here, smartly conveying the characters' personalities, although the opening scene is a little cringeworthy. The art is brilliant again, with some clever visual techniques used. The highlight of the issue for me is a scene where both writing and art excel in portraying three slightly insane and highly entertaining freedom fighters of diminutive stature. The main characters seem to be fading into the background in this title as the tiny Mini-Cons get the best charactisation and the best scripting, and yet it doesn't seem to matter!

The Verdict: Forget the disappointing Generation One; this is the best new Transformers series since the original Marvel comics. (KG)

The Stuff of Dreams
By Kim Deitch
Fantagraphics

It's easy to think of the US underground comix of the late 1960s as having been a revolutionary movement that came and went with all the other cultural events of the time. But to do so is to ignore the fact that it produced quite a few very individual voices, which have never been absorbed into the mainstream. Compare it with UK "new wave" music - maverick talents like Paul Weller and Elvis Costello have effortlessly become mainstream, but the same can hardly be said of Robert Crumb or Gilbert Shelton... or of Kim Deitch.

As with other of those underground voices, Deitch's style hasn't changed much over the years. He's refined it; looking through the pages of this new offering you can see how the almost clumsy, "bigfoot" drawing technique, all popping eyes, stiff figures and chunky limbs, is now wrapped up in complex and layered panel constructions. His storytelling, too, remains the product of a deep personal interest in the lost by-ways of Americana. As so often it is centred around his own creation Waldo, star of 30s animated cartoons and cynical avatar of production line processes. It is with Waldo's constant deaths and rebirths between appearances that Deitch perhaps comes closest to the superheroic mainstream - but as the title of this one shot suggests, he eschews that kind of half-baked realistic fantasy, opting instead for a powerful and personal blend of reminiscence, pop culture, imagination and, yes, dreaming.



The result is unsettling; not disturbing, but to engage with it is to ask questions about what is real and what may not be. That's a recommendation!

The Verdict: Deitch's vision may *look* cosy but has many barbs which will hook you into deeper considerations than you might have expected. Just roll with it! (MK)

X-Statix #2
By Pete Milligan and Mike Allred
Marvel Comics

A year and a half after they first took charge of Marvel's least fêted mutants, Milligan and Allred are still kicking over the applecart on a monthly basis, pointing out the futility and redundancy of the rest of the Marvel line along the way. It's a wonder the company lets them get away with it.

They've held firm through 16 issues and one name change. As well as ridiculing superhero convention, they're still pointing their satirical arrow at other forms of media saturation with the current storyline featuring a superhero take on the *Pop Idol/ American Idol* phenomenon. In the hands of lesser creators this could come across as hackneyed, but in Milligan and Allred Marvel have struck creative gold. Whilst it may initially seem that editor Axel Alonso is just letting them loose with the whole Marvel toy box, he's somehow managed to find two idiosyncratic creators that, working together, are producing some of the best work of their already rather notable careers.

Allred seems liberated by sharing the workload, and, free to concentrate on his art, he's rejuvenated, every panel sparkling with his Kirby retro dynamism. He was always generating more ideas than he knew what to do with, but here it seems that he's being encouraged to come up with an escalating, ludicrous series of characters, and there will be room for all of them.

It's also the most focused and accessible work that Milligan has produced for years. He's always at his best when there's a definite synergy between himself and his artist, and the chemistry between these two is palpable. It's oh-so-apparent that they both have a lot of fun working on this comic. It's so obviously a match made in heaven, we're left to wonder why it took them so long to get together, and whether they'll ever work with anybody else again.

Of course, if the book was purely a satire, by now it would be tiresome. Somewhere along the line, in between the piss-taking and backbiting, Milligan turned these characters into people. They're not ciphers, each one of them is an individual and they're still reacting to Edie's demise three issues later, each in their own painfully believable way.

The ostensible bad guy in this issue is an X-Force fan gone bad. After a particularly vindictive prank involving his old music teacher, his mother warns him. "Arnie", she says. "How many times have I told you not to rearrange the skeletal structure of your old teachers?"

It's sublime.

The Verdict: The only Marvel comic you'll ever need. (SM)

Weasel #5
Dave Cooper
Fantagraphics Books

Cooper is one fucked up guy. However, he is also one of the few innovatively disturbing creators left in US comics. Like Charles Burns and Jim Woodring no other artist embraces the disturbing quite like Cooper.

This is a truly difficult thing to describe and I mean that in a positive way. Weasel isn't for all tastes, yet I expect there're a lot of voyeuristic people out there who would pick this up out of curiosity. The cover is adorned with fat and ugly raven haired women in black underwear; turn the page and you're greeted with a frontispiece spread (literally and metaphorically) of naked women, of all shapes and sizes, in an assortment of bizarre poses - some sexual, others playful. You turn to the editorial page and are greeted with yet another naked girl, with massive eyes who is sitting open legged looking up at you with a sweet smile on her face and then straight into the final instalment of Martin's attempts to win the affection of the fat, ugly and slightly neurotic Tina. This is by far the most overtly sexual and sinister part of this story. Martin has read all the signs wrongly and embarks on a ludicrously sexual pursuit of the naked and sleeping Tina that results in unexpected violence, despair and guilt, mixed with anger, frustration and resolution. The story concludes two years later with Martin seemingly coming to terms with his disastrous attempts to woo Tina, but in his cellar we see the truth...

More pictures of naked women in bizarre landscapes follow, then you get something that is both fabulously surreal and ultimately pointless - a two-page spread of what looks like an excerpt from an alien journal. You can't understand it, but you get an uneasy feeling that putting your own description to it wouldn't be that difficult.

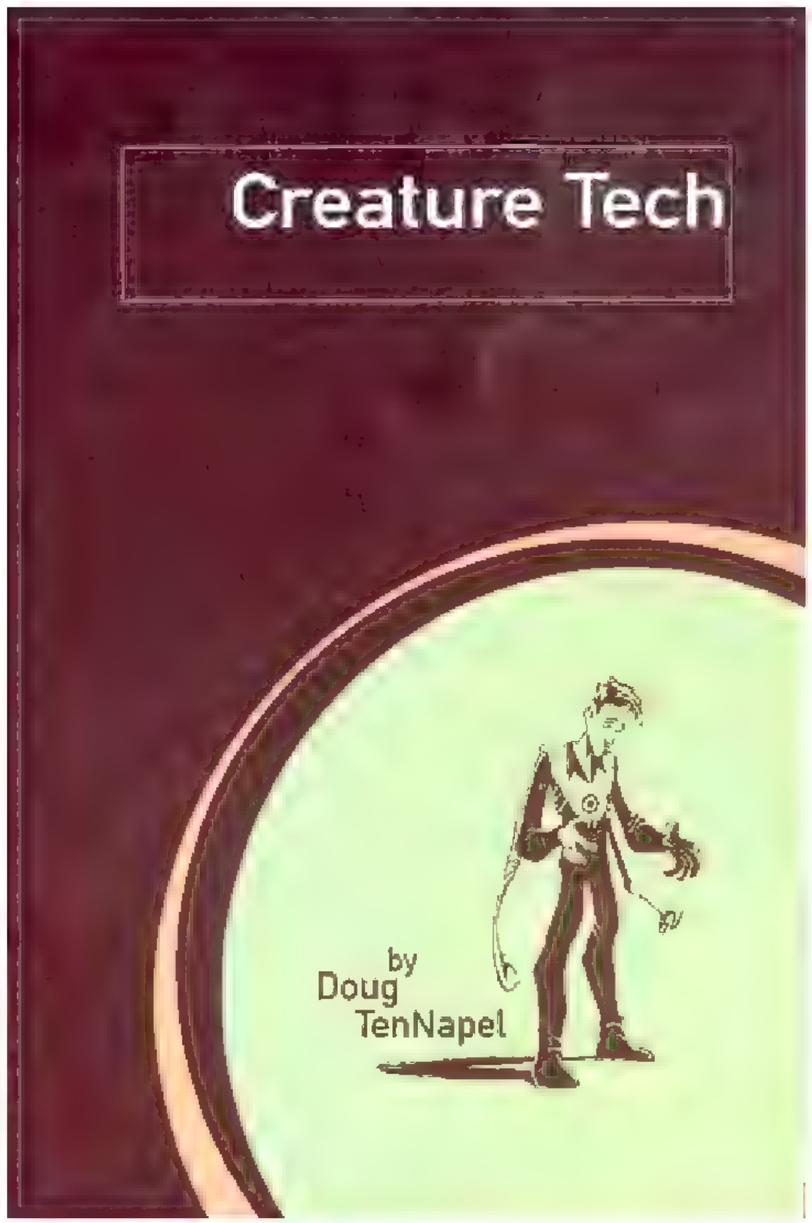
The last story in Weasel is something like a cross between Martin and Tina's story and the alien journal. In the latest Eddy Table adventure, *Television Program X-32 B*, Cooper again shows the audience that as well as having a warped and slightly "out-there" mind, he is a master at changing his style and retaining the same fluidity. The story begins with Eddie on the psychiatrist's couch not knowing for sure why he is there. The doctor decides to simulate sex with him, appears to orgasm so hard she becomes catatonic and so Eddy elects to take her with him. He leaves her office, and wanders through landscapes that are both familiar and slightly alien before meeting a bizarre insect which instructs him to pick up a sheet of wood from what looks like a lake. An argument ensues and Eddy storms off alone, goes home and meets his girlfriend who begins to have oral sex with a penis growing out of her arm. In turmoil Eddy runs away, meets an old girlfriend who is doing weird shit with babies and eventually hides in a strange cafeteria with a cheerful goth girl eating cubed pork stew.

This is the last conventional issue of Weasel. It is changing and, as Cooper says himself, some of his impending standalone projects might not even be comics. Whatever he does you ought to give yourself some nightmares and check him out. He's doing what some comics should be striving to achieve.

The Verdict: Pure Bunuel mixed with Dali and for 20 bucks you can buy an Eddy Table doll. Magic. (DRB)

THE VERDICT
GRAPHIC EXAMINATION

Creature Tech
By Doug TenNapel
Top Shelf Comix



HOW on Earth did a small publisher get this masterpiece?

No, scrub that. Top Shelf Comix's bosses should be no less than beatified. This is an extraordinary graphic novel from the creator of *Earthworm Jim*. It incorporates all those favourite elements of comics: giant space eels, zombies with English accents and a penchant for 70s hits, the Turin Shroud, a CIA-trained preying mantis/man hybrid, people with funny names, human breast milk, a man of science turned to the cloth and vice versa, a physically handicapped love interest, weird shit and a benign alien symbiote. You know the sort of thing? A cast of characters that makes up one of the most refreshingly brilliant stories this reviewer has had the fortune of reading in nearly 20 years. I haven't stopped crowing about how fucking magnificent this is for nearly a week; I've even threatened my wife that I'll divorce her if she doesn't break a habit of a lifetime and actually read a graphic novel.

I will personally visit each and every comic fan that doesn't buy this book and kill their women, children and household pets and I'll piss on your plants just to add insult to injury and I'll be laughing like a drain as I do it.

Look, I'll be serious for a second. It's a comedy. Not a total comedy. It has pathos, drama, love and, well, weird shit in it too. It is a complete story, but it leaves enough open at the end to give us more, more, more and believe me, you'll want it. Dr Michael Ong is a hero for today. Blue the Mantid should get his own series. Dr Jameson is one of the coolest villains you'll ever meet. Katie is beautiful, despite her afflicted hand and wonky, slightly mutilated eye. The remainder of the town of Turlock, Ong's hometown and HQ for the institute the locals call "Creature Tech", are either bordering on totally eccentric or just full-blown apeshit. It all moves along at a cracking pace, has twists and turns at every corner and even while it's humorously busting clichés it is doing so with a decidedly self-deprecating stance. It even manages to have a few subtly unexpected twists near the end that are so superbly done it takes you a couple of days to realise they were even there. And of course when you do realise it your first instinct is to be even more impressed.

Sure, there are going to be people who don't like this, but they're either dead, stupid or both.

THE VERDICT: Ahhh, it was OK, nothing special. Bwah-ha-ha - just kidding, you'll be reading this to your great grandchildren - provided they haven't got the DVD of the inevitable film. (PH)

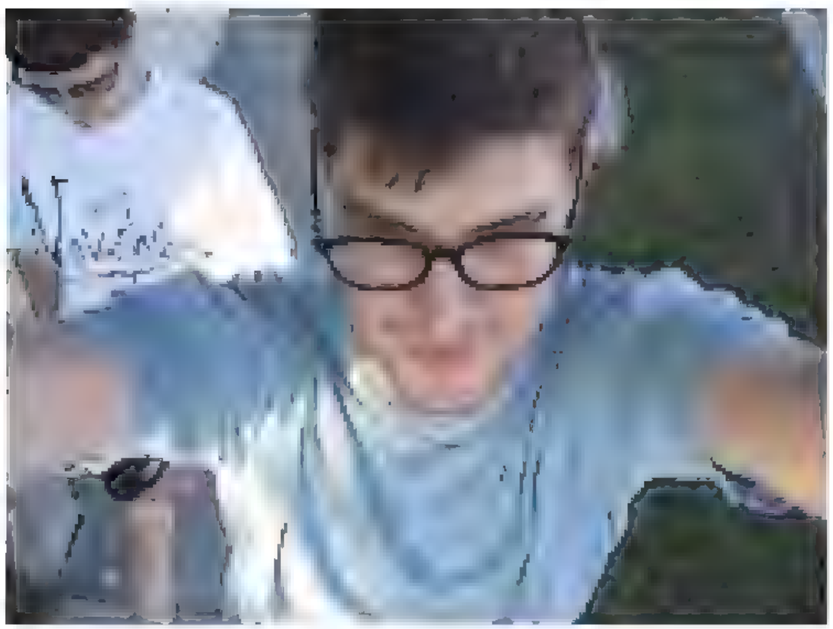
CREATURE FEATURE

Phil Hall thought Creature Tech was so great he was prepared to stalk Douglas TenNapel and even kidnap his cat to get an interview, but all he needed to do was ask...

ADDING a touch of continuity to the flow of this month's **Borderline**, Doug TenNapel's **Creature Tech** was one of the books I took on holiday and had confiscated by my wife. As I stated in my review on the previous page, she now has to read the thing or I'll be filing for divorce.

A colleague in the industry claimed **Creature Tech** was the best American animated adventure of all time and it's still just a graphic novel. The simple truth is that Top Shelf Comix and TenNapel are responsible for one of the best breaths of fresh air this industry has taken in years.

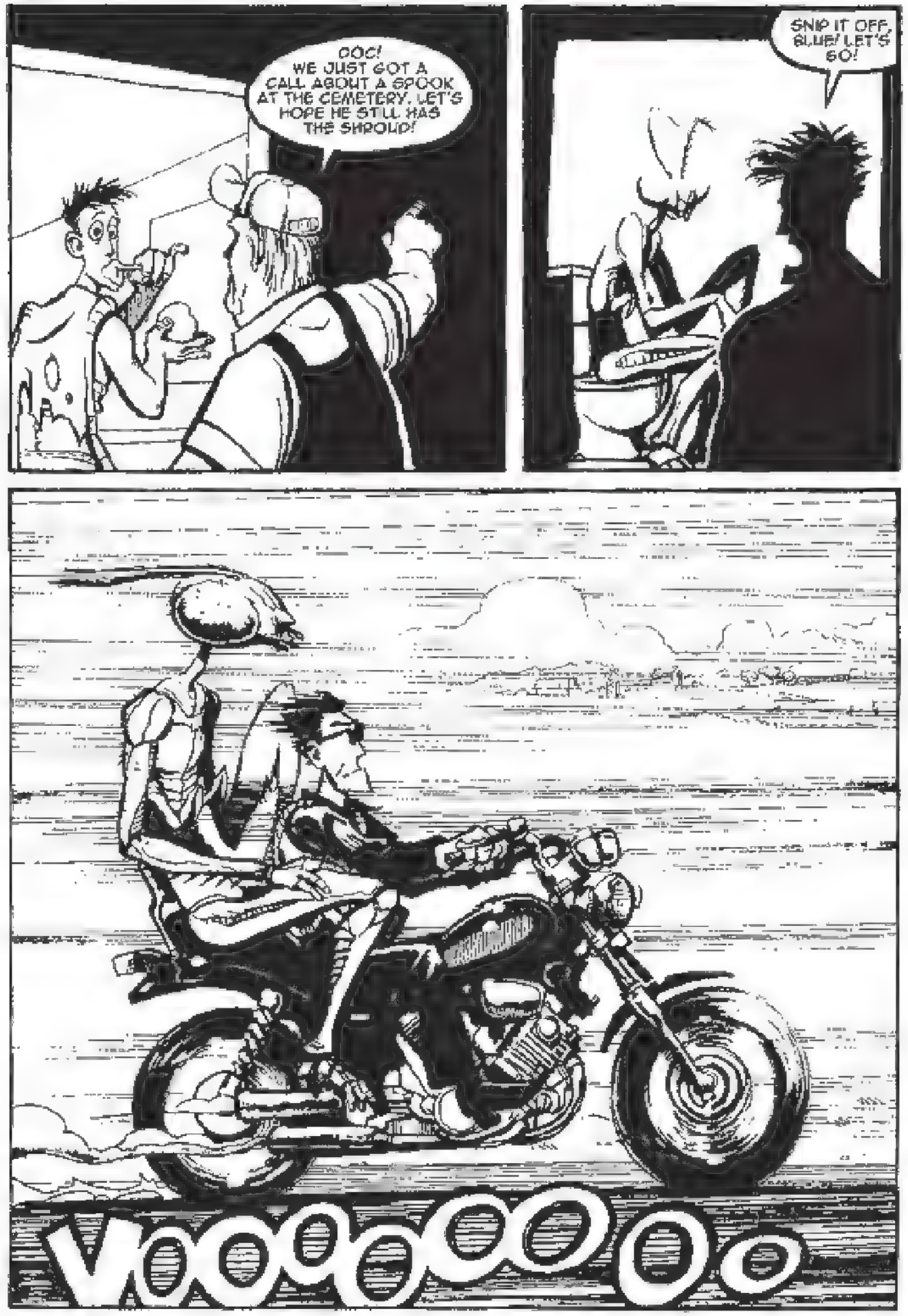
So... I decided that **Borderline** needed to do something about this and faced with a 24 hour deadline, I fired off a lot of questions to Mr TenNapel in the hope he could turn them round in 24 hours. He managed it in 12 and further impressed the hell out of me.



Above: Doug TenNapel; all illustrations from Creature Tech.

Borderline: Some people might be familiar with your name from Earthworm Jim, but care to give us a quick run down of who you are and why you're here?
Doug TenNapel: I made Earthworm Jim and a clay animated game called the *Neverhood* that the English press destroyed and ruined our UK release back in 1996. I'm here to tell stories... primarily for Americans but others may listen in.

BL: How did Creature Tech come about and how did you hook up with Top Shelf? As much as I love Chris and Brett's company it doesn't fit in with their normal fayre.



DT: Creature Tech was a movie script that I couldn't get sold for six years. Naturally I wanted to tell this story that nobody wanted to hear because I wanted to hear it. I giggled while I wrote it not knowing how many folks would eventually like it.

I chose Top Shelf because they didn't try to hog the movie rights and they gave me the final say in what to do with the story. It is a different sort of book for them but I think they don't put limitations on themselves arbitrarily. If more action-comedy stuff [were] presented to them that had a clear unique voice they would probably pick it up.

BL: How did you come up with Michael Ong and why was Jameson English?

DT: Michael Ong just sort of came out after I created his surroundings. He really is everything that the town is not. This makes him a perfect hero; he stands out from his surroundings. Jameson was English because I LOVE picking on the English. They make great villains! (to we Colonists!) I'm not saying that I hate all Brits. I love the Queen and Tony Blair has the good sense to want to remove Saddam (though his own fricken' peers don't have the moral clarity to support him). Oh, yes, and the Beatles rule.

BL: Any plans for a follow up and has it been optioned for a film yet?

DT: I have plans for a sequel but I'm not sure when I'm going to do it. It's a big honkin' weird story that will offend everybody. The movie has been optioned. I'm writing the script so it won't stink.

BL: A Blue (the human-mantis hybrid) follow-up book perhaps?

DT: That reminds me, I gotta kill that guy off in the next book, he takes too long to draw.

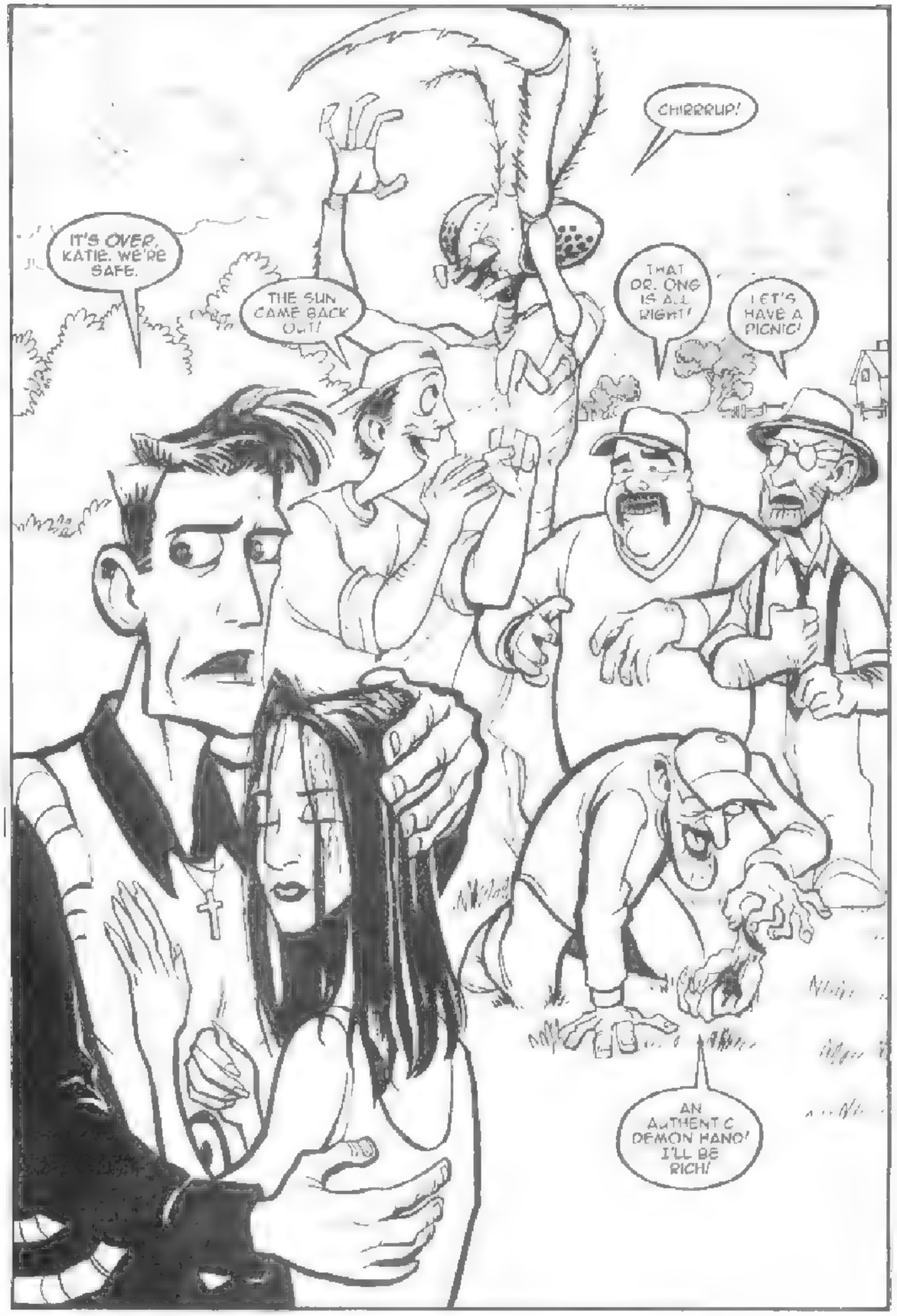
BL: Parts of this book were just so out of left field it was amazing. How does someone come up with ideas like a Mantid riding pillion passenger and a giant space eel?

DT: I've always come up with this stuff. It's easy. I read Creature Tech and it makes perfect sense, like this is how all stories should go. The mantis riding on the back of the bike is what Creature Tech is all about. It just looks like a documentary.

BL: What next and can we watch?

DT: Creature Tech is opening a LOT of doors for me. More stuff is coming down the pipe but it's going to take a lot longer now that I'm busy on the movie.

Creature Tech by Doug TenNapel is published by Top Shelf Comix, is on sale now from all good comics shops and is priced $14.95.


CHIRRRUP!
IT'S OVER, KATIE. WE'RE SAFE.
THE SUN CAME BACK OUT!
THAT DR. ONG IS ALL RIGHT!
LET'S HAVE A PICNIC!
AN AUTHENTIC DEMON HAND! I'LL BE RICH!

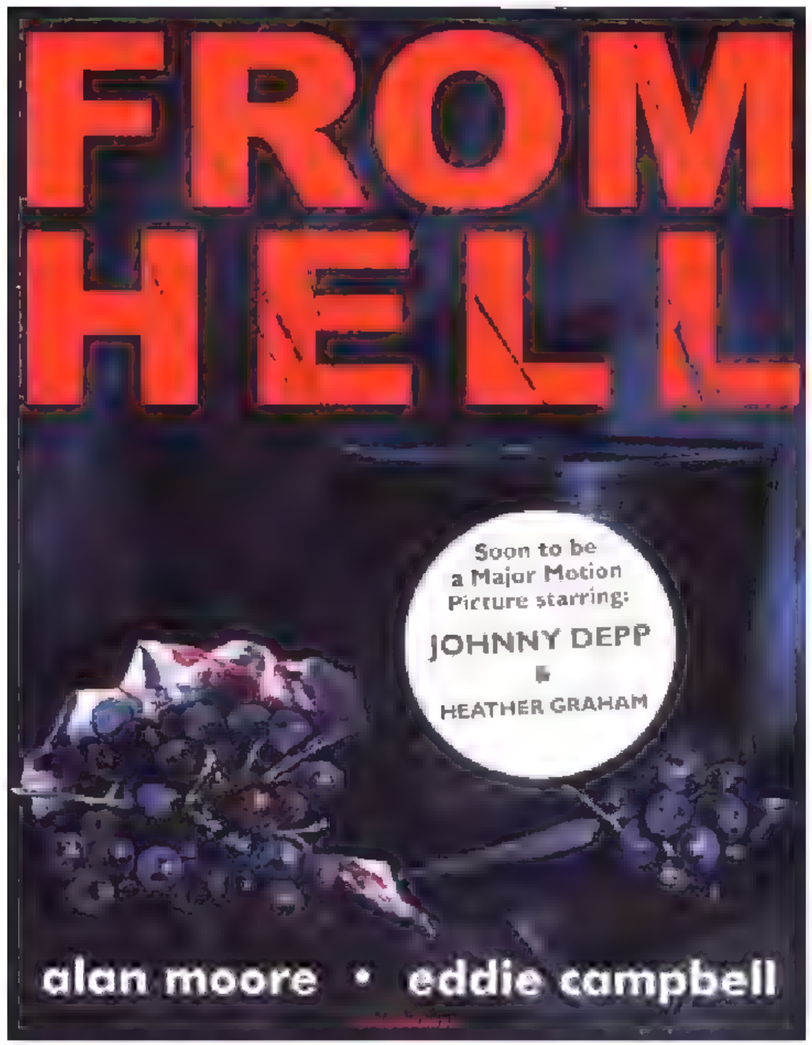
THE VERDICT

COLLECTED EDITION

FROM HELL

By Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell

Knockabout/Eddie Campbell Comics



FIRST of all, I should say that I actually quite liked the film, Marilyn Manson soundtrack aside. Yes, it was a stripped down version of the book, but that's what happens when you make films of books this large and densely written. If you wanted exactly the same content, but with moving pictures, use your imagination. That's what it's for.

The main problem with the film (apart from the aforementioned soundtrack) is that it made the story into a "whodunnit", whereas Moore and Campbell's original is more of a "whydunnit". Moore twists the usual psychoanalytical viewpoint in serial killer fiction by focussing not on the psychological sickness of the killer, but on the psychological sickness of society. He seems to conclude that underneath everything, some kind of traumatic psychophysical Bell curve exists, and that the horrors perpetrated by mankind are a manifestation of this. In doing so, Moore raises the question of how sick our society is if we can boast many more of these manifestations than the Victorians ever could. Serial killers, wars and destruction abound today and what does that say about the psychological state of our world?

That's just one possible reading of one aspect of this work, which is as densely informative as Watchmen although in very different ways. Whereas in Watchmen, the genius was the playing around with the format and structure of comics themselves, here the brilliance is more subtle, and is shown through the story itself rather than through the techniques used to tell it. Moore is asking questions about human history, about destiny, about time and space, about Jung's collective unconscious, and about humanity itself. The answers are complicated but fascinating and, rather wickedly, could be nothing more than coincidental. This is perfectly embodied in a puzzling ending which can be understood in a number of ways, all, some or none of which may be accurate.

As noted above, as a piece of serial killer fiction this excels, not least because it manages to make the "society made me do it" excuse into something less trite than it has become through unimaginative overuse. The horror of Jack the Ripper's actions is effectively conveyed through gruesome scenes which disturb not because they are gratuitous splatter material, but because of the calm, methodical and detached way they are presented, a reflection of the surgical way the killer actually did the deeds. Although the murders are lengthy and detailed, they do not come across as exploitative. Much of this is due to Eddie Campbell's fine artwork, which has a realistic edge that manages to convey subtle, creeping horror. Indeed, many of the most eerie and disturbing sequences are not the murders, but the depictions of Victorian London's physical landscape. Campbell gives this unhealthy town a foreboding and apocalyptic look perfectly in tone with Moore's writing. The city's landscape becomes a physical manifestation of, and a channel or conduit for, the psychological landscape. Symbols abound, as obelisks point to the sky like conductors of some kind of invisible energy, and churches squat heavily as if to hold something down that should not be let loose. Although the details of much of this are in Moore's writing, only Campbell's art fully conveys the doom-laden atmosphere.

This wonderful synergy between writer and artist eliminates the silliness at the heart of much of the book. Mystical locations around London are joined by a pentagram, the Freemasons stick their noses in everywhere, the monarchy is involved in evil conspiracies, and the killer's crimes are part of a grand magical spell intended to allow him to transcend space and time and exist everywhere and everywhen at once. In fact, a cursory reading makes From Hell look no different to the kind of sensationalist writing peddled by the likes of Erich von Däniken, and it is a great testament to the hard work and consummate skill of the authors that they avoid such silliness by so wide a margin. Another contributing factor is the deeply ambiguous storytelling, which, in reflecting the uncertainty surrounding the Jack the Ripper myth, manages to raise questions about some of its wilder elements. Does Moore believe this stuff? Does the killer? Do the supernatural and metaphysical events portrayed actually happen, or are they merely hallucinations or the ravings of madmen? The posing, and ambiguous answering of such questions are what make this book such a deep and rewarding read.

My only criticism is that as entertainment it falls rather flat; but then, this is not about entertainment. This is far more a scholarly text, a musing on some deep and complex subjects clothed in the form of a comic. It is yet another example from Moore of what comics can do, in this case the medium's ability to be academic and scholarly, a technique he'd later use less successfully in Promethea. As such, From Hell is also highly recommended to those interested in the structure of the comics medium, and of storytelling in a wider sense.

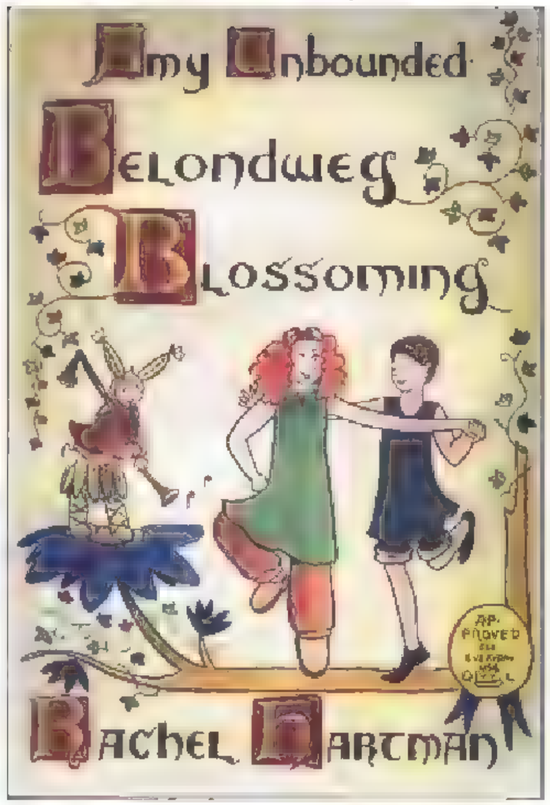
For entertainment, however, you'd be better off renting the movie. Despite the soundtrack. The Verdict: Dickens would have been proud of this intelligent and richly layered look at the nature of humanity. (KG)

Amy Unbounded: Belondweg Blossoming

By Rachel Hartman
Pug House Press
ISBN: 0971790000

Amy Unbounded is set in the medieval, fictional kingdom of Goredd where dragons can pass as human researchers and the local knight lives in a cave. It is summer, Amy Eddybrook is on the brink of becoming 10 years old, and she is reading about the legend of Belondweg.

The central character of Amy is a charming nine year-old girl, just starting to look more closely at the world around her and push against the restrictions of her society. In her introduction to the book, Linda Medley suggests that Amy is a "wild-haired, spirited, strong-minded, independent heroine [...] suited for our post-modern times" and I find myself agreeing with her. Amy is an easy character to like, full of fun and frolics. For example, in the first few pages of the book we see her acting out parts of the Belondweg myth with her friend Bran; playfully bickering and imitating the patron saint of ducks! As the book progresses we see her grow and learn about love, life and friendship. Aspects of the changes Amy undergoes in the course of the summer are nicely portrayed in two scenes that take place on the bell tower of the local church. The first scene, at the beginning of the book, shows her looking from the church tower over the cluster of local farms and exclaiming: "I'd never been up so high. I could see the whole world." Near the end of the book, Bran explains that he has to leave, while Amy stands on the turret with an image of a burning castle in the distance. As her world rapidly expands, her conceptions of it go up in flames.



One of the reasons why Amy Unbounded works so well is because of its wonderful cast of supporting characters. One of the most intriguing, and my favourite, is Lalo the dragon. We never see him in dragon form during *Belondweg Blossoming*, but rather passing as a human researcher on a field trip studying the history of the socio-cultural impact of the Belondweg Epic on Gorredd. A rather grand sounding research project, that mainly seems to consist of him sitting in kitchens and listening to the local women talk.

Amy also has some interesting female role models. Her mother comes from a Northern barbarian tribe, and sometimes finds it difficult to stick to the local customs. Then there's Bran's older sister Niesta, who keeps house for her older brother Cullen; according to Gorredi law he owns her, and she seems to accept her role meekly but really wishes she were elsewhere. Pearl-Agnes Fortellga seems to be in a much more powerful position than Niesta, as she is a wealthy textile merchant; but she is in danger of losing her business if she does not marry as the law requires.

As you may have surmised, Hartman is exploring the position of women in society and although the setting is mediaeval, many of the issues are still relevant to women today: the ties of family duty, cultural traditions, and equal rights. It is not just the women that are shown fighting and crossing the boundaries of their society, though: Lalo breaks the laws of the land and Amy's father, Bob, finds his livelihood threatened when he opposes the weavers' guild.

Another theme that is explored is first love; we see Amy experience her first crush, and any of us who can remember liking our friends' older siblings can relate to her feelings as she discovers the object of her affection kissing someone else. We revel in seeing Niesta fall in love, and hope along with her for a happy ending, but Hartman does not give in to cliché, giving us a much more realistic and satisfying resolution instead.

I find Hartman's clear line style perfect for bringing out the personalities of her characters. Amy's curly hair shows her wild side - her simple eyebrows and mouth immediately show the mood she is feeling. Each character is an individual, with different body shapes, hairstyles, features and quirks, making them instantly recognisable, demonstrating a diversity that is sadly lacking in some comics. While the characters' facial expressions are drawn in clear, minimalist fashion, you can also see that Hartman researches her subject in-depth, for the period costumes show a close attention to detail. Some of the most sumptuously drawn scenes are those of the wedding of Pearl-Agnes, illustrating the pageantry associated with the time period, and contrasting well with the farming and kitchen scenes in the book, which show the more day to day reality of living off the land.

The Verdict: A lovely book that will appeal to anyone aged between eight and eighty. The best endorsement I can give it is to say that it is one of the few comic books that has made me cry and then made me want to run out and get everyone I know to read it. (SL)

My struggle never ends,
Pau-Henoa
Tell my people
I am lost.
And that I loved them,
But they would not know
Belondweg if they
saw her now
I am transformed
THIS IS PRETTY DRESS, ANJH? TOO BAD YOU HAVE ONLY CRABBY FACE TO WEAR WITH IT.

Of Love and Danger

Animal Man: Origin Of The Species

By Grant Morrison, Chas Truog and Tom Grummett

DC/Titan Books

Alan Moore famously suggested that the trend towards grim 'n' gritty ultraviolence that infected so many comics in the 90s was largely due to "a bad mood *he* was in" when he wrote the hugely influential Watchmen. It's a shame then that more people didn't take inspiration from another late 80s classic - one which never received the same acclaim as Moore's much praised series but is easily its equal - Grant Morrison's Animal Man.

To suggest that any comic from that era (save perhaps Miller's original Dark Knight) rivals Watchmen will be heresy to the Church of Moore, but don't dismiss me just yet. Both books take forgotten pulp characters and a love of the medium itself as their starting point, then deconstruct both to startling effect. Where Animal Man differs from Watchmen, though, is that while Moore finds his deconstruction leading to a dark pessimism, Morrison manages to retain the colourful optimism inherent within the concept of the costumed superhero, even while tearing his character's world apart – literally by the page.

On the surface, Animal Man is a book about a superhero with animal powers, naturally involved in the animal rights movement - a much greyer area than the black and white of heroes and villains. Along the way, Morrison mixes in ghosts, time travel, politics, comedy and shady government-sponsored killers. Buddy Baker and his family are possibly the most endearing characters this side of Peter Parker and his classic supporting cast; and the complete twenty-six issue run (of which this book represents the middle eight) ties together plot threads and themes in such a satisfying manner that the series as a whole repays re-reading in a way few monthly comics have ever managed. (Indeed, many of the balls set rolling in Origin Of The Species only find their goal in the final, as-yet-unpublished, volume - which is perhaps the only drawback for new readers at this point.)

Beyond all this, though, Animal Man examines the

GOOD COP – BAD COP

Transformers: Target: 2006

By Simon Furman, Geoff Senior and various artists

Titan Books

In terms of technique the writing is a little scrappy and clumsy, yet despite this Simon Furman's strengths of strong plotting and great characterisation shine through.

Furman made these characters his own, giving them a strength and dignity not normally associated with toy tie-ins. Of particular interest is his portrayal of the "new leaders", Galvatron and Ultra Magnus. Furman gives Galvatron a calm confidence in his invulnerability, superbly conveyed in a sequence where he faces down an enemy strike squad without resorting to violence. Effectively contrasted with that is the hopeless tragic bravery of Ultra Magnus, a hero out of his depth, forced to confront a foe he knows he cannot beat. The psychological fallout from this contrast is one of the most interesting features of later Magnus/Galvatron confrontations, and it is highly interesting to see the origins of it all here.

A number of artists share the chores, giving the book an interesting and varied look. None of the styles grate with each other, and each artist adds his own effective touches to the established characters. That said, there are clear favourites here. Geoff Senior, one of the best Transformers artists of all time, shows in this book why he deserves that appellation with some absolutely gorgeous artwork. Indeed, his art on Chapter 8 of the story stands as not only some of his best, but also some of the best art I have ever seen in a comic, UK or US, aimed at kids or not. It is just a shame that the reproduction for the TPB has washed out the sumptuous colouring in places.

Apart from the slightly disappointing colour reproduction, and some shamelessly shoddy "editing-out" of "continued after next page" type notices on the original pages, Titan does a very good job with the collection. A new Geoff Senior cover creates a suitable mood and certainly attracts the eye, while the back cover reprints almost all of the covers from the ten comics that make up this collection. Inside, Titan includes background material which contains some surprises even for the most ardent UK Transformers fans, and should be highly interesting for those unfamiliar with this titan (pun not quite intended) among UK comics.

The Verdict: Not just a great Transformers comic, but a great comic full stop; you'd be a fool to overlook this! (Kelvin Green is the Good Cop)

Perhaps you have to be a certain age to "get" the Transformers; falling outside the age group that bows down before these and *Battle Of The Planets* and all that other '80s kids' stuff, I can only take the material presented in this collection at face value. All that comes to my attention is a garbled story, further hindered by confused pencilling. Once you've seen one gaudily-painted robot you've seen 'em all, and to imbue any interest in them as characters takes better writing than is shown here.

Of the far-too-many chapters reprinted herein only those pencilled by Geoff Senior are in any way followable, with their clear dynamics and drawn with the knowledge that boxily-constructed automata need an uncluttered background to work against. There's a hell of a lot of exposition and a fairly lengthy introduction to get through before you can enter the actual plot, and frankly it's not worth the bother of working out who's who and what they've been up to. It's only a bunch of bloody robots, and a bunch of licensed property bloody robots at that. Maybe you had to be there.

The Verdict: Overpriced and not very wonderful. Has been transformed into a ball of crumpled paper in a corner of the room. (Martin Shipp isn't)

conflict between character and creator, asking - in reaction to DC's Crisis On Infinite Earths - just what happens to fictional realities when history becomes so easily rewriteable. It's an enormous undertaking, but Morrison maintains a balance between humour and horror throughout... as when the Psycho Pirate asks, "Did the Wolfman give you my name?" before explaining his greatest fear, "If I go to sleep they might decide to remove me from the continuity and then I'll never wake up."

The Verdict: I could fill an entire edition of Borderline writing about this book... and still have things left to say. Instead, I'll just say – go and buy this, read it... and get ready to read it again and again and again... (RH)

Daredevil: Underboss

By Brian M. Bendis & Alex Maleev
Marvel Comics

Fans of Brian Michael Bendis' early crime comics like Jinx and Goldfish will be pleased to hear that his latest Daredevil run is the closest he's come to recapturing that style and tone within the superhero genre. Miles away from the quirky parody of Powers, here Bendis forces DD back into the dark underbelly of New York, yet somehow avoids the Miller-lite trap. Where Frank Miller's New York crime scene was super-hero noir, Bendis chooses instead to downplay the costumed elements further, taking inspiration from his favourite moviemakers - Tarantino, Scorsese and Mamet.

Underboss jumps back and forth in time like *Reservoir Dogs*, and must have been difficult to follow in monthly instalments. Read as a whole, though, the plot structure is impressive, with only the annoying imposition of the "'Nuff Said" silent issue calling attention to itself as a single episode. Following the opening chapter, Daredevil himself steps into the background - the true protagonist of this story is Silke, a *Goodfellas* wiseguy who provides a new perspective on the DD/Kingpin relationship then uses his angle to execute a decisive coup on Wilson Fisk's criminal empire. Dialogue remains Bendis' ace - though the would-be David Mamet in him slips up occasionally through simply forgetting that, however much he fleshes them out, these are still characters on a page. Without actors' voices to bring them to life, the speech patterns do occasionally blur into a mass of clever-clever Bendis-speak. BMB remains the best dialogue writer in comics - he just sets himself a very high standard to maintain.

Alex Maleev's artwork is almost perfect for a book like this. Occasionally his photo-grab backgrounds do distract the eye from centre stage, but he handles the long conversations well, never letting the storytelling become repetitive.

The Verdict: A twistily plotted crime story with strong, unpredictable characters, sudden bursts of violence, and screenplay-worthy dialogue. (RH)

Forge #6

By Various
CrossGen

This and its sister title Edge are beginning to suffer somewhat as a result of the success of their publisher. As CrossGen expands its line, more titles are reprinted in these anthologies, diluting their quality. Part of the reason for this is the often bad pacing in CrossGen comics, which is far less noticeable when more than one chapter of a story is reprinted. With more stories being reprinted, the regular reprints get less pages, and this problem is highlighted more and more. All of the strips in this month's Forge are crippled by this paucity of material, with only a Bayeux Tapestry-themed episode of the excellent samurai strip *The Path* remaining immune, largely due to foreboding art from guest illustrator Walt Simonson.

The Verdict: There are too many strips being reprinted now, with the result that the individual strips are finding it hard to stand out from the crowd. (KG)

Edge #5
By Various
CrossGen

Very few surprises here this month. *Mystic* continues to be crap, plumbing new depths with a desperate gangster/film noir-type story which fails to fit in with the concept of the series at all. The entirety of this month's *Sigil* concerns a meteor hitting the hero's home world, which only goes to highlight how badly these must read as single comics. To be fair, *Sigil* is one of the better stories printed in Edge, but one chapter devoted entirely to one event is disappointing.

The First shows faint glimmers of interest, and of ending, as one of the characters finally finds their "god", in the hope that he'll stop the war (and the series). He tells her to bugger off and offers some advice that shows the writer is trying very hard to maintain some interest in this very dull series, but is failing in a rather embarrassing fashion. *Way Of The Rat* is fairly decent, with some good art, although the art team seem to have problems with faces, unless this is an alien world where people have faces on the sides of their heads. It would be unfair to condemn the story based on the first chapter, but I find it difficult to see how an ongoing series could be supported by the concept. I find myself warming to *Scion*, as the engaging plot continues to hold my attention, despite its fantasy cliché trappings. No doubt the art, with its unique and unconventional style, helps to maintain my interest.

Although I claimed that there were few surprises this month, I must admit that there is one big surprise in that this month's instalment of the usually excellent *Ruse* is rather disappointing. More Scooby-Doo than Sherlock Holmes, the clever writing is replaced by a plot resolution involving the rather un-Holmesian concepts of advanced genetics and atomic theory. As a result, *Ruse* seems rather rushed and pointless, despite more superb art.

The Verdict: There's little to recommend this compilation this month, with even *Ruse* under performing. (KG)

Four Women
By Sam Kieth
DC/Homage

Four women of different generations endure a nightmare attack when their car breaks down on a lonely highway. It's a violent and disturbing story, though not without moments of macabre humour, and it stands as the most mature work of Sam Kieth's career. Dealing with themes of survival and sacrifice, cowardice and bravery, guilt and recrimination, Kieth's story takes four distinctly drawn characters and pushes them to their limits. Like all the best horror stories, it places the reader in the centre of the action too, forcing us to ask how *we* would react in the same circumstances. It's a story that stays with you a long time after reading.

Kieth's art has matured too. The cartoony visuals of The Maxx are still present in places, but often used as deliberate contrast to the horrific scenes they depict. Kieth also develops a strong line in realistic portraiture that captures the heroines at crucial moments throughout, revealing inner strengths and sensitivities the script would have stumbled over.

In his introduction to this collection, Sam Kieth worries that his story fails because he can never know what it must be like to be a woman trapped in a situation like this. It may seem unnecessarily self-critical - after all, that's what fiction-writing is all about - but it also bodes well for his future as a creator that he's never really satisfied. Let's hope he continues to push himself.

The Verdict: A "must read" comic – disturbing but honest and hopeful. A creator on his way to greatness. (RH)

Pinky & Stinky
James Kochalka
Top Shelf Comix

Sometimes it's difficult to see why such an innovative and forward-thinking publisher as TSC would entertain so great a fraudster as Kochalka. It makes my blood boil that this worthless and whiny creator gets published so frequently when it is becoming obvious that he is self-obsessed and unbelievably untalented.

This is the story of two piglets on the moon and is jammed pack full of cod metaphors for life. If Kochalka has a problem he ought to do us all a favour and quit comics and get a job working with dysfunctional people - he might learn something. Apparently this 100+ pages took him 11 months to complete. That'll be a week writing and drawing it and 10 months and 3 weeks laughing at all the people who will line his pockets with undeserved cash. And to think the world is prosecuting Milosevic for crimes against humanity...

The Verdict: Every publisher has someone on its books who shouldn't be there, for Top Shelf that's this man and while I'm probably in the minority about this guy – like Kochalka, I *know* I'm right. Now just fuck off, will you! (DRB)

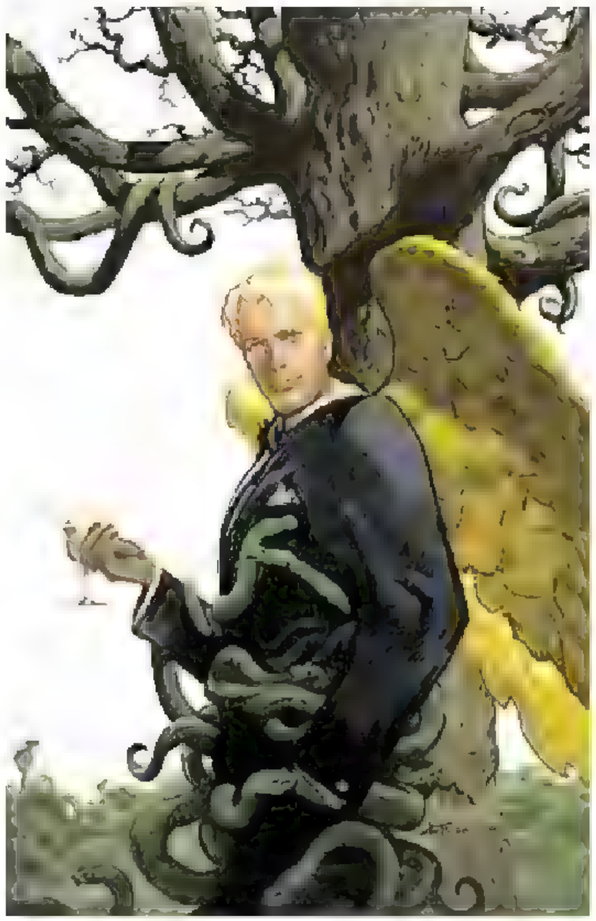
Lucifer: A Dalliance With The Damned

By Mike Carey, Peter Gross, Ryan Kelly and Dean Ormston
DC/Vertigo / Titan Books

The most successful and entertaining Sandman spin-off, due largely to Mike Carey's focus on wickedness instead of whimsy, and his canny understanding that when you've got the devil himself as a title character, a little goes a long way.

In this third volume, Lucifer has abandoned both Hell and Heaven in favour of a whole new universe. Creating it from scratch, he hopes to put right a few of the things that went wrong first time around. Typically he can't even get beyond the Garden of Eden before old friends and foes are messing with his creation - or using his absence to further their own ends in the old universe. Carey has developed a wonderfully nasty cast here to play against Lucifer, most notably the Joan Collins-y bitch queen Lys and her sometime cohort Duke Seviram. He thankfully avoids the Gaiman trap of needless philosophising, leaving readers to make their own minds up rather than ramming the point home in a word balloon. The different artists mesh well, with Dean Ormston (a less misshapen Ted McKeever) just winning out over the (very) occasionally unreliable team of Gross and Kelly.

The Verdict: The Sandman spin-off it's OK to like. (RH)



The Ultimates Volume 1: Super-Human

Marvel: By Mark Millar and Bryan Hitch

People are saying that this is the new Watchmen, that this is the most important comic in years. If that's true then I must have missed the point somewhat, since despite the superb art and polished writing, it isn't that special. The art team produces a gritty, filmic look for the book, with a realistic colour scheme and understated superheroic elements. This makes those elements all the more impressive when they do occur, an effective tactic that restores a sense of wonder to what many thought was a stale genre. Similarly, Millar writes this from a less fantastic and more rational viewpoint, stepping from the world of superhero fantasy into a harder science fiction setting, and giving it an intelligent and realistic feel. His dialogue and characterisation are also spot on, most notably in the portrayal of Captain America as a slightly insane super-Republican, a logical step onward from the original concept and one that is far more interesting than his ultra-moral flag-waving Marvel Universe counterpart. The other characters - Thor, Wasp, Giant Man, Iron Man and Hulk - are less developed but remain interesting, with realistic personalities, and understandable motives.

All of which makes my ambivalent attitude to the book all the more puzzling. Even though it is of undeniably high quality, it remains rather un-engaging, and although I enjoyed this volume, I have no desire to read the next one. Perhaps this is due to the lack of any real plot in this first book. Obviously, this is only meant to be an introduction and as such a lightness of plot might be expected, yet there is nothing at all here to ensure continued reading. One of the characters remarks that without any villains to fight the team is rather pointless, and this is true of the book itself. Without any kind of conflict The Ultimates cannot engage the readers' interest, since the only drama comes from the team's interactions with each other. In any other genre this might be fascinating, but when the book is centred on a super-powered strike force, the lack of conflict is fatal.

The Verdict: Good art and excellent writing cannot hide the lack of dramatic pull that hinders this otherwise exemplary comic. (KG)

ZINE SEEN

Hardly The Hog #5/6

By Jamie and Alex Coward;
£2.25 from Jam Up Comics, P.O. Box 1466, Sheffield, England S3 9YA

This long delayed issue concentrates on wrapping up the spoof of *Jaws* which commenced last time around. Along the way Hardly the Hog himself becomes something of a minor player – if a major presence, since he's standing in for the shark, complete with a massive shark costume – which means that the languid philosophising of earlier issues is largely replaced by a great deal of fun being poked at the interface between reality as it might be, and reality as it is subjectified and distorted by the process of movie making.

The result is both highly amusing and very thoughtful. We all know (I hope!) that film realism is in fact anything but real. So of course, is any realism that may be found in comics; so when one kind of artifice is applied to the debunking of another, what are we to make of the result? Parodying an old and celebrated blockbuster movie might seem like shooting at an easy target, but while the Cowards don't skimp on the jokey references and keep the entertainment value high, there's far more depth to what they're doing here than you'll find in most spoofs.

The mildly sarcastic script and expressive art - Alex Coward quietly achieves a great deal with the tricky placement of solid blacks - blend very effectively, adding up to a package that provides solid meat for those that might want it, and chunky entertainment for those who might prefer that.

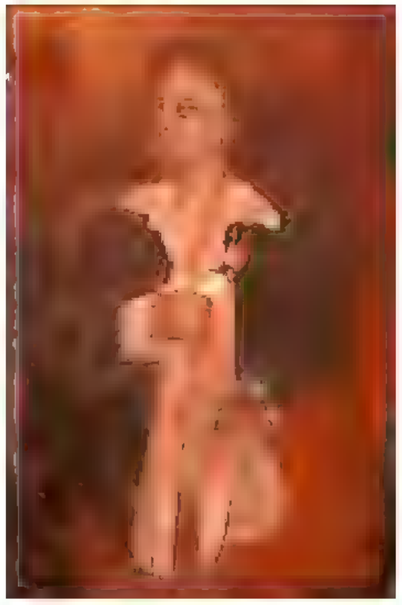
The Verdict: You should read the earlier issues first to catch the full flavour of this one. Do it - Hardly The Hog offers more style and food for thought than many a mainstream title. (MK)

Mortal Coils #1

(Buy online at *www.serious-about-comics.com* or email A. David Lewis at *ADL6@georgetown.edu* for further information.)

Mortal Coils is a black and white American small press title with production values so professional you'd have difficulty telling it apart from anything published by the likes of Oni or Avatar. Indeed, self-publishers the world over should take a serious look at this debut issue and use it as a guide as to how they might improve their own comics.

Not only does Mortal Coils look great, it reads pretty well too. Of the two self-contained stories featured within the book's 28 pages, *Disembodiment* is by far the best. A genuinely disturbing tale, it takes the male/female body swap premise of the Steve Martin movie *All Of Me* and gives it a decidedly sinister twist that's about as far away from fun physical comedy as it's possible to get. Lewis's writing is the strip's main strength. Although a little wordy at times, he's an undoubted master at building tension and the economical way he sets up both his characters and ideas are the marks of a very talented writer. Artist Evan Quiring's figure work reminds me a little of Steve (Queen & Country) Rolston but it perfectly fits



the strip's dark mood.

Deeper Blue is a total change of pace from *Disembodiment* and illustrates Lewis's ability to effortlessly swap genres without a loss in quality. This time we see events through the eyes of a genius inventor as she battles to escape the grasp of a team of robotic hunters. All in all it's a thoroughly enjoyable sci-fi romp with a decidedly dark heart. Terrific stuff.

The Verdict: The finest self-published title I've come across in a long time. Highly recommended. (AW)

Nucomix #6

(£1.50 for 24 A4 pages from Simon Bowland, 7 Waterside Close, Madeley, Cheshire, CW3 9TH)

Simon Bowland should be congratulated on his professionalism and dedication in getting a new issue of Nucomix out every month. After all, many UK small pressers struggle to publish one or two issues a year, let alone 12!

That said, this anthology title is a somewhat mixed bag in terms of subject matter and quality. Easily the most intriguing of the four main stories featured here is *The Activist*, the story of a young girl with a mission to "correct the world's ecological ills" Rik Hoskin. The central character, Jade, is sympathetic, the art - courtesy of John Doran - clean and crisp. Unfortunately, this six page instalment is somewhat undermined by a lack of action and seemingly little in the way of story progression (we're told Jade's a witch on the editorial page, but don't even get to see her perform any magic). Furthermore, there's no cliffhanger at the end or indeed any indication of what is likely to be resolved/explored in the next issue to tempt the reader to come back for more. A shame.

The second story, *Piranha*, suffers from being six parts into its run and is therefore likely to leave first time readers (like me) completely baffled as to what is going on. The art and lettering are substantially poorer than in *The Activist* too. Bowland's own story, *Slayhunter*, isn't a great deal better, owing rather too much to Marvel/Miracle Man and featuring a deeply unpleasant central character with a nasty line in homophobia. As TV shows like *The Sopranos* have shown, the art to writing a good anti-hero is to at least make them charismatic – Slayhunter is nothing more than a horrible, bullying scumbag and it's therefore impossible to make any emotional investment in him.

The Secret History is a self-contained five-pager with a *Future Shocks*-style twist. It features strong art by Faiz Rehman and a clever, satisfying conclusion. Nucomix should attempt more one-off stories like this.

The Verdict: Nucomix has a lot of real potential that isn't being realised just yet. I shall enjoy watching it improve month by month. (AW)

The O Men #16

(£1.50 from Martin Eden, 19a Trevelyan Road, Tooting, London, UK SW17 9LS)

The series returns to more traditional superheroics this issue, as the team face an attack from an old enemy. Eden skilfully portrays the villain's memory-based powers, creating a highly effective disjointed narrative, both in words and pictures, as the characters are forced to relive unpleasant experiences. Art is much improved, with Eden beginning to acquire a professional level of quality. There is less of the in-depth character interaction and "slice of life" format that sets this apart from other superhero titles, which is something of a disappointment, but Eden handles the superheroics very well indeed, and in many ways it is refreshing to have an action-led issue.

The Verdict: Something a little different this time, but still one of the best superhero titles available anywhere. (KG)

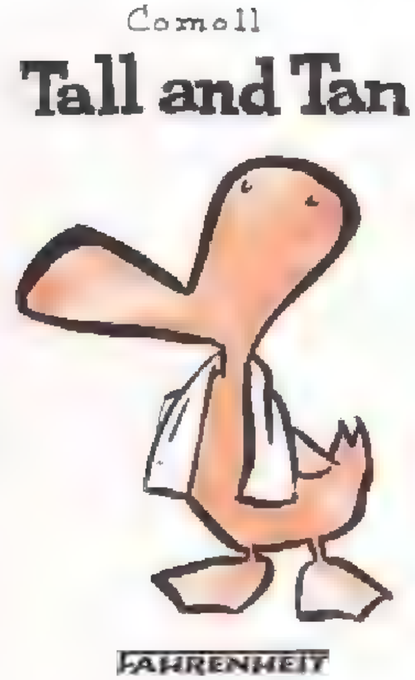
Tall and Tan

2 Euros from Ole Comoll Christensen, Bregnerødgade 9 1. sal, 2200 Copenhagen, Denmark

As an English small press enthusiast I'm still slightly startled whenever I come across a beautifully printed 12 page A6 comic which has an ISBN number... and I can be certain that whenever I do it won't have been published in Great Britain. In fact, you'd be lucky to find *any* comics published in Britain with ISBN numbers!

Anyhow, this is a delightful *jeu d'esprit*. Christensen has simply taken the lyrics to a verse and chorus of Antonio Carlos Jobim's bossa nova classic *The Girl From Ipanema*, changed every instance of the word "girl" to "duck", and drawn around it a comical and elegant strip about a duck walking to the beach. It isn't quite that simple, though – where the lyric is filled with lovelorn men hopelessly watching the girl, here the men have become predatory hunters. The duck/girl saunters through them all, oblivious to the threat they present. The drawings are clear, almost minimal but with enough warmth to amuse and delight any but the most jaded of eyes.

The Verdict: Feminist metaphor? Allegory casting mankind as predatory animals? Probably neither – but in any case it's a delightful little booklet. (MK)



Judge For Yourself

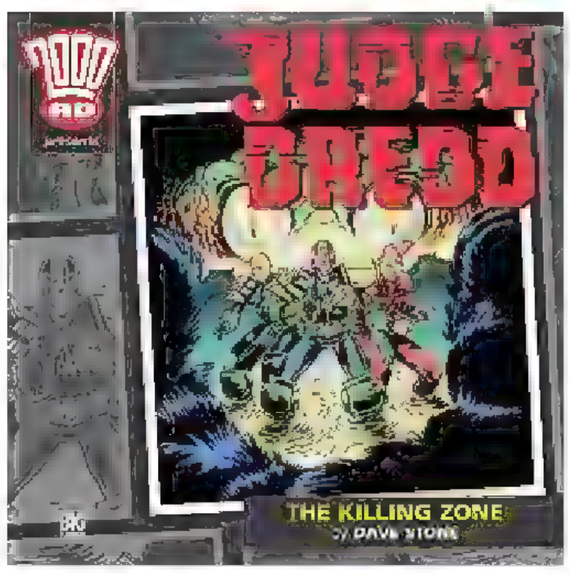
A round-up of recent audio adventures from Big Finish[available from www.bigfinish.com]

2000AD Presents #4: Judge Dredd The Killing Zone

Big Finish Productions
Written by Dave Stone
Directed by Nicholas Briggs

The first Dredd audio-prog written by someone other than David Bishop, and Dave Stone hits it out of the ballpark.

If you were listening to this story without reading the cast list, you could be forgiven for thinking that the cast included Al Pacino, football commentator John Motson and Roz from TV's *Frasier*, menaced by the late Terry-Thomas...



"The Killing Zone" is a snuff-sport gameshow - the latest Mega City 1 fad to get the Justice Department baffled. Like a cross between the World Wrestling Federation, *Robot Wars* and *Fight Club*, half a billion viewers watch while the Judges try to shut the Zone down. Dredd, separated from his Big Finish-created sidekick, Cadet Judge Amy Steel, has to seek more unorthodox assistance, from two members of other Justice Department branches: the Psi-Judges and the Wally Squad. The Wally Squad is the nickname given to the Judges who go undercover among criminals. Psi-Judges is, unsurprisingly, the branch for Judges with psychic abilities. Because of the nature of their work, and the rarity of people born with psychic gifts, they are allowed a more relaxed attitude to their work, unlike the stiff-necked street Judges, of which Dredd is perhaps the most rigid of them all. This naturally leads to conflict among the trio here.

The author posits a highly amusing reason why female Psi-Judges wear such provocative uniforms, all tight leather and zippers at half-mast; either consciously or unconsciously, it is a form of rebellion against the Justice system, making all those celibate street Judges hot under the collar when they swing by... Stone makes use of a couple of characters from the Dredd strips: Psi-Judge Judy Janus, created by Mark Millar, Grant Morrison and Carlos Ezquerra, and his own creation, Efil Drago San, overlord of Brit-Cit's underworld in Stone's Armitage series. Drago San is brought to glorious life by Stephen Greif, (following Jacqueline Pearce's lead in hopping from *Blake's 7* to Big Finish; readers may remember him as the first actor to play the villainous Travis).

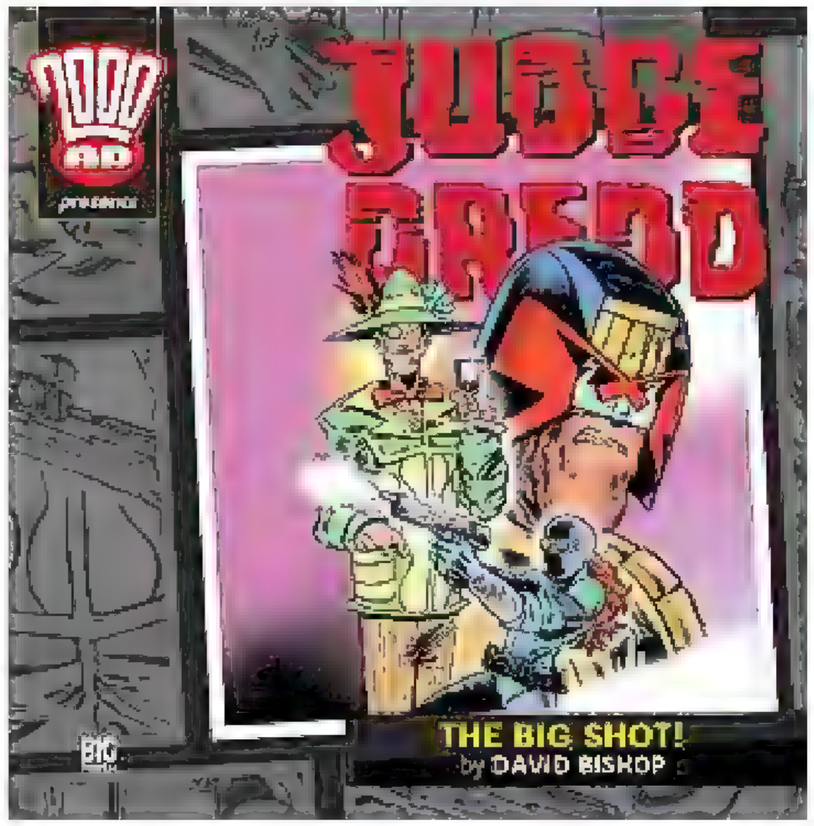
The plot is quite slight, but it hardly matters when characterisation is this good. Enigma Smith, the recurring news anchor character, is less intrusive than in previous appearances, and accompanied by another commentator based firmly on the legendary John Motson. Wally Judge Traven and Psi-Judge Janus seem to have been imbued with all the excess personality left over from the rather duller Steel, but I suppose that's only natural, when the Judge system is supposed to produce law enforcers who live only to serve the city. These eccentrics of the justice system, especially when measured against Dredd at his terse best, were always going to steal the show.

The Verdict: Proving that not all Judges have to be cut from the same mould, *The Killing Zone* sets the standard for future Dredd audio-progs. (JE)

2000AD Presents #5: Judge Dredd The Big Shot!

Big Finish Productions
Written by David Bishop
Directed by John Ainsworth

After *The Killing Zone* diversion, we're back to the not-quite-so dynamic duo of Dredd and Judge Amy Steel, as David Bishop takes the reins again. Quentin Quail, an auteur director from Brit-Cit, is in town for a retrospective of his career, despite threats on his life. Against his wishes, Dredd is assigned to babysit him, in order to keep him alive long enough to get him out of Mega City One airspace and avoid a diplomatic



incident. Quail's self-obsessed demands of his roboservant and Dredd make for entertaining listening, as the story twists and turns, and Quail blunders from one life-threatening situation to another.

The story falls down in a couple of places though. The ending is a clumsy set-up for Bishop's next Dredd audio, *Get Karter* (three guesses as to the name of the movie inspiration for that story!), which makes the whole drama seem like an extended prologue to the main action. With a little more subtlety, that could have been downplayed and then picked up in the later story as a reward for attentive listeners. With this story, we realise that all Bishop's audios so far have formed an arc of stories about Amy Steel, and it appears that *Get Karter* might bring that arc to a conclusion. The other problem I had with *The Big Shot!* is a bigger deal, because there is a major plot flaw at the heart of the piece. I can't go into detail without spoiling the story, but suffice it to say that it undermines repeat listening, once you know how it all turns out.

The Verdict: Worth 70 minutes of any Dredd fan's time, but don't think about the plot too much. (JE)

YOUNG GUNS

It's not age but talent that determines tomorrow's stars today... this issue:

Nigel Lowrey

*Editor's note: I've known Nige well for over a decade and it seems strange to me that he's still trying to make that breakthrough. From his days illustrating the first **Jock** series (a well-regarded UK small press comic) moving to his own creator-owned comic, **Silver**, and now back full circle drawing the Jock again for the new on-line version.*

It's probably my fault he's still trying to work professionally in the industry, we'd spend hours talking on the phone about his potential, when I should have just let him go off and do what he's always wanted to do: be weird! If Nige could get paid for being slightly 'out there' he'd be a rich man!

I BLAME me grampie. He was a good painter so whether, as some geneticists say, inherited traits sometimes skip a generation or I just caught the bug from watching him work I can't say - but I've been drawing since before nursery school and have carried on long after his death. Unlike the stereotypical British boy, I didn't grow up adoring football, following the Beano and coveting flash cars, but with 70s Marvel UK weeklies, *Star Trek* on TV and *Star Wars* just everywhere. Instead of hours spent on the footie fields, I was expanding my imagination through reading fantastical tales, and learning to draw by doodling superhero after superhero, usually Marvel or DC characters but eventually my own too. I can't remember when I originally "outgrew" comics, but I was reintroduced to them shortly after Secret Wars kicked off and I've stayed with them ever since.

Eventually, the idea got into my head to try and draw comics professionally, as nothing else held any appeal; and after a few years of deserved rejections from comics companies and a brief bit of work experience at the 2000AD offices, I drew my first strip proper nearly ten years ago... The Jock, a tale of rebellion against the banal and mediocre. The series, coming out nearly monthly for most of its 25+ issue run, was a good place to learn how to draw sequential strips - there's nothing like practice. Along with The Jock other small press projects popped up, including scripting my own creations *Silver* and *Wolf Who Thunders*, and they too helped the learning curve. However, life got in the way: just as writer Rol Hirst and I started to really hit our stride, and the quality of my work began to steadily improve, The Jock fell by the wayside. I continued drawing, only for my own pleasure, sketches and stuff. But my interest in comics remained and Rol and I remained friends. Eventually, after a fair bit of

cajoling from former readers, the decision was taken to return to work on The Jock…

The first issue is now complete and ready to read online - *www.angelfire.com/comics/thejock* - and the entire opening four issue story arc is written, just waiting for me to draw it and then for us to start pushing it to the publishers. Work on #2 has been delayed due to a number of other projects. A few requests and commissions have resulted from my own website *[www.angelfire.com/comics/galleria]*. An 8-page caper strip was scripted, pencilled, inked and lettered in just a few days and produced as an inlay for a CD single from a band called Geeks - that has been made into a 3-minute flash animation, with derived merchandising galore available at their website *[www.10ptv.com]*. And I've a shot at producing a strip for an imminent mainstream British general interest magazine launch. Commissioned illustrations for a novel and the desire to produce more samples for publishers are also lurking about. And then there's the desire to do more writing…

The rest of the year will be a bit of a blur, but next year will hopefully see some movement on The Jock. Anyway, I'll be plugging away as usual on as many things as I can handle!

Nigel Lowrey

Nigel Lowrey

And cue the dry ce...
Is your perfect society really worth the total absence of pleasure...? Of spontaneity...? Of fun?
Lose the feed! Return to standard programming!
Don't say another word!
OK guys, they're cutting, I'm losing channels!
48 through 52 have returned to gardening the 30's are back to home improvements
But I'm holding all the news and film channels, Jay! We've still got a 48% audience share!
SONG FOR SUZY
"She" by Green Day
SONG FOR WARKMAN
"Teenage Dirtbag" by Wheatus

MAN ON A MISSION

Martin Shipp's vision of a better comics industry...

JOURNALISTS. Don'tcha just love 'em?

When I own the BBC, the first thing I'm going to do is summon Barry Norman to my office and give that boy a sound telling-off. Barry, for those who live outside of the BBC's immediate sphere of influence, was for a long time the host of, and only reviewer on, the company's only regular TV programme covering cinema. Eventually he took the Murdoch shilling and went to work for Sky, the UK version of Fox or Star, but before he did so Barry was a respected and much-loved fixture on our screens, famous for his slightly debauched air, for a catchphrase which he never actually said, and for bags under his eyes the size of elephant scrota.

Barry continued to work for the BBC's print arm after he'd left the television show, and still has a weekly column in the corporation's flagship weekly magazine *Radio Times*. However, it was in a newspaper interview that Barry explained why he was leaving television. It was (and here I para-phrase from memory) because he felt that cinema was becoming ever more dumb, and that the chief symptom of this was the growing number of films being made that were based on comicbooks. My God, he cried, even Ang Lee is making one! Cue the many-headed beast!

Barry's place on the TV show was taken by a chap called Jonathan Ross. Personable chap, well-known as a dandy, rescued his flagging career by reinventing himself, Madonna-style, as a bit of a jack-the-lad; flinging expletives around on the many other TV and radio shows he presents or takes part in, yet staying reserved - almost intellectual - on the cinema programme. Ross is a well-known fan of comics: he once owned his own store. Ross is also one of a small dynasty; his brother, Paul, has a media career of his own, albeit of a lower grade than Jonathan's. Paul, when not hosting *Psychic Challenge* on some micro-channel or other, also works as a film reviewer, on Britain's largest-selling tabloid newspaper the *News Of The World*. The *NOTW* has a rep for being a muck-raking scandal sheet (sample front page headline: "Moment cocaine-crazed TV star begged for sex by pool of death"), but its TV reviewer is nicely cynical so we'll not castigate it for serving its market as well as it does.

Paul Ross, Elvis Impersonator: not the Paul Ross we're talking about

It has recently been Ross (P)'s job to review the film version of The Road To Perdition. Personally I found this film to be slightly disappointing, containing as it did absolutely no appearance by Bob Hope or Bing Crosby, nor any sight of Dorothy Lamour, a sarong, or a talking camel. But that's just my opinion. Ross (P)'s opinion was also less than complimentary, but for these reasons:

"Maybe it's because *Road To Perdition* is based on a US comic book. Pretentious, ponsified Yanks now call them graphic novels, but they're comics - and they can't communicate the adult emotions of a great book or play."

Whereas an episode of *Psychic Challenge* can, no doubt. While I don't doubt Ross (P) has based this conclusion on a long consideration of his brother's X-Men collection, he fails to convince for the simple reason that he doesn't show his workings. He doesn't tell us *why* a comic book or ponsified graphic novel can't communicate adult emotions. In fact he misses a point, in that a great play can also fail to communicate adult emotions if performed or directed badly: imagine, say, King Lear played by Albania's favourite knockabout comedy pensioner Norman Wisdom ("Mr. Grimsdale! How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child, Mr. Grimsdale! Ah ha ha ha ha !!" [falls down manhole]). (And, as a further parenthetic digression, how many people just thought of Chris Claremont?)

Well, there are a lot of comic-based movies either out now or coming soon. They'll range from the sombre *Perdition* to the Nintendo-attack that is *Spider-Man* to what one fervently hopes will be a stunning *Hulk*. But what's the betting that when Ang Lee's film is released, some dumbass smartmouth reviewer will forget that Lee's greatest success so far was with the genre movie *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon?* Or that (with any luck) the film *The Hulk* transcends the usual comic-to-movie action-adventure slugfest and is a moving portrayal of a man betrayed both by science and by emotion? What's the chance that some other jackass will not treat the film as it should be, as a piece of film-making by one of the most impressive and versatile film-makers around today, but as... a comic book movie?

Because movies based on comics are never any good. All of us who saw *Ghost World* know that.

BORDERLINE VOL #1 CDS

Would you like a complete set of Borderline Volume 1?
The first 12 regular issues, the Manhattan Projects Special, #13 and a special bonus Borderline feature? Over the last 14 months we've covered some major events, interviewed some pretty big people and produced one of the most popular and dependable comics magazines in the world.
How much is it going to cost?
If you live in the UK it's £7.50 inclusive. The US and Canada is $20.00 inclusive and Europe is €15 also inclusive of p&p.
All cheques and IMOs should be made payable to P. Hall and please allow at least 28 days for delivery. All enquiries to the editorial address on page 2.
To pay via Paypal contact *squonk_uk@yahoo.com* for details!

DRAWING BOARD

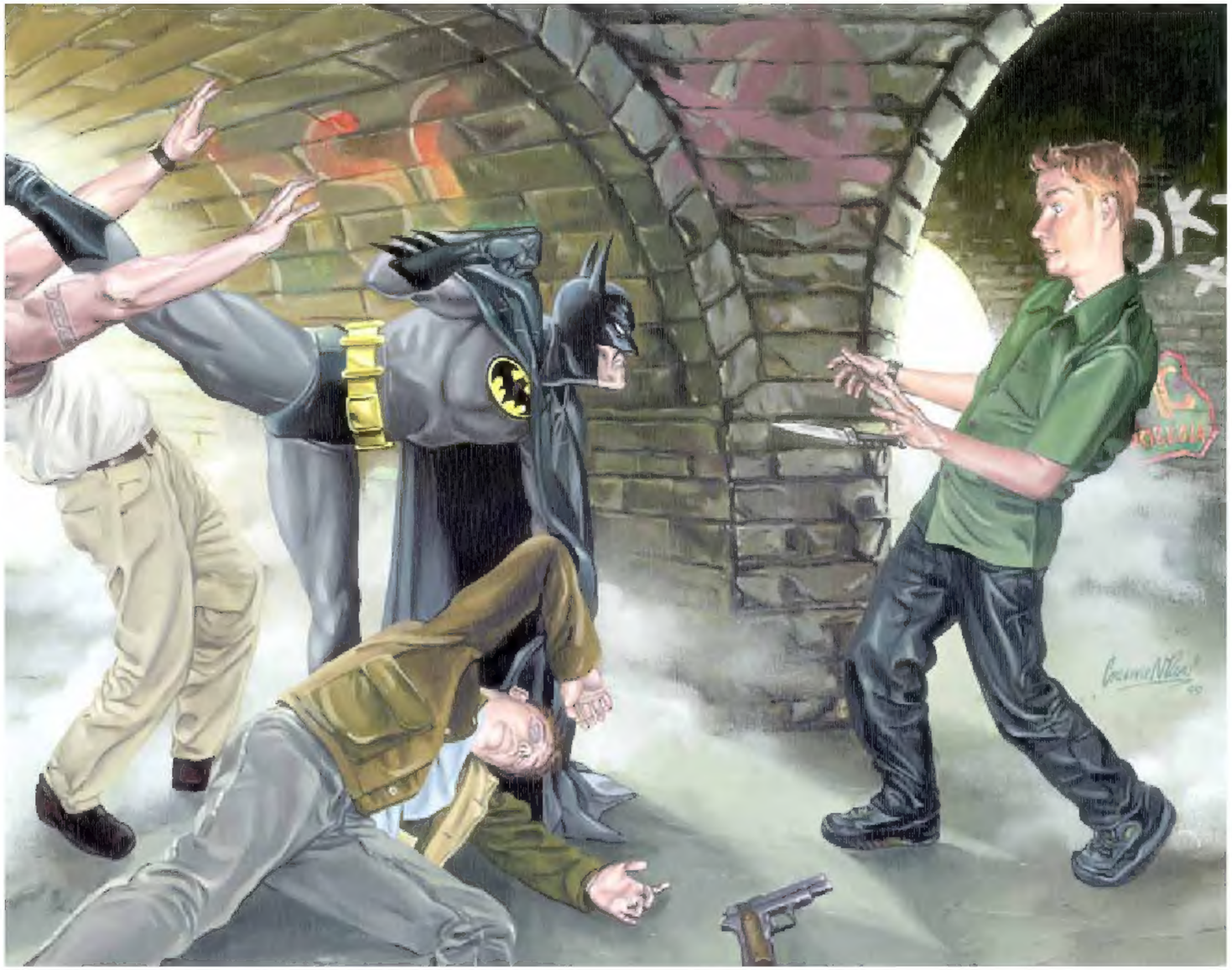
Secrets and lies, truth or dare: this is the artist's spotlight... this issue: Graeme N. Reid

DO you realise how many people want to work in the comics business? You can probably guess that it's a lot. So, keeping that in mind, do you know how hard it is to actually start working in the comics industry? Ten years ago I realised, and went and got a job instead. "So you stopped trying huh?". Nope, I still want to draw comics for a living, but keeping a regular flow of comics work is a hard task for even the most accomplished artist. You ask any writer/artist and they will tell you that they work on a lot more than just comics. Work on any job that pays - and that's exactly what I do... I'm a Freelance Illustrator.

BLAST INTO ACTION WITH
ACHTUNG!
FOR BOYS
6p
EVERY MONDAY No 372 22nd February 1980
PACKED WITH DARING ADVENTURES
A TRUE STORY
BELGIUM, 1944. THE EUROPEAN THEATRE OF WAR HEADS FOR THE FINAL CURTAIN. AMERICAN SERGEANT SAM 'DEADSHOT' SALONE AND HIS BUDDIE JOSEPH SPEIGLEMAN HEAD THROUGH THE ARDENNES FOREST.
A SHORT DISTANCE BEHIND AN URGENT CONVOY OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EXPLOSIVES.
Two more kilometres to our rendezvous and no sign of the Hun! A quiet journey for us...
Jeepers! Hit the dirt Joe!
BANG! BANG!

So let's have a little history then. I was a late bloomer towards artwork and didn't even consider I could make a living from illustrating until I was about 16 (I was going to be a joiner up to that point). Over the last ten years I have done a wide range of work away from comic books: from commercial work in advertising and marketing for the likes of BT, The Royal Bank of Scotland and Standard Life; commissioned oil paintings; card and packaging illustrations; web page design and graphics; editorial work; murals; bill boarding and poster work; photographic manipulation; newspaper illustrations and even painting leather jackets! As well as working in traditional methods, I am a long term user of the beautiful Apple Macintosh. Currently using a G4 450MHz machine, I work in Photoshop, Illustrator and Painter to help create a blend of traditional work or purely digital illustrations, depending on the clients' needs. Right, you're probably getting the idea, I've done a lot of work outside comics so I'll stop yakking about that and start on about the work I most enjoy.

Like most kids growing up in the UK in the 70s I read an awful lot of comics (hey, the ZXSpectrum wasn't around until later). The Beano, The Dandy, Victor, Warlord and



Commando were all DC Thomson favourites - and, of course, later on you had Starlord, 2000AD, Scream, Battle, and let's not forget Marvel UK's Hulk, Spider-Man and Captain Britain comics. From the large list of comics artists who have influenced me over the years some of the earlier greats include Ron Smith on *Judge Dredd*, Cam Kennedy on *Rogue Trooper*, Jose Ortiz on *The Thirteenth Floor*, Geoff Senior on, well, lots of things and let's not forget Brian Bolland, Kevin O'Neill, John Cooper, Frank Hampson, Eric Bradbury... and the list goes on. Well, with that list you can't help but feel inspired and I used to sit and draw my favourite characters. So the years fly by and I decide to start drawing my own strips. After some initial small press work (hi, Bill and Reuben), I produced some one-off black humour type strips for American publishers including work for Caliber Comics' Negative Burn (hi, Joe and Roxanne). In Britain my work has appeared in Soaring Penguins, Meanwhile... comic (hi, John) and most recently back in small press work again, including Zarjaz (hi, Andrew) and The Girly Comic (hi, Selina and Jay). Also of note is the work I have produced based on the most excellent TV series *Doctor Who*, a big heap of which appeared in the charity book Missing Pieces (hi, Shaun and Mark). You can check out more of my comics work at my sometimes updated website: www.gnreid.co.uk

As for the future, well, more of the same. Dream jobs include producing work for *Doctor Who Magazine* (hey, Mr Hickman are you there?). I'd love to do a Commando comic for DCThomson, some Warhammer work for the Games Workshop guys maybe, and a regular painted cover job would be sweet! Real jobs of the future include some fantasy style paintings for role playing games, more *Doctor Who* work for another charity book (hi, Alryssa), illustrations for a Doctor Who authors' website (hi, Cav), and more work for Zarjaz.

(P.S. hi, Mum, Dad and, uh, everyone else).

STEVIE SCORES A SCORCHER...
OKAY, PARS—UPFIELD WITH YOU. IT'S TIME LIVINGSTONS GOALIE HAD SOME WORK TO DO...
RIGHT TO MY FEET! NICE ONE, WESTIE...
'WELL GET MOVIN' WITH IT!
I'LL NAIL HIM!
HE'S DRAWN MY MARKER OFF ME. HOPE HE NOTICES!
STOP 'IM FOR PETE'S SAKE!
I'M ON!
YOURS STEVIE, YOU'RE IN THE CLEAR!
STEVIE TURNED ON A SIXPENCE AND... GOAL!
YES! TWO-NIL TO US!

Graeme N. Reid

FOUND THIS OLD GUY, SNOOPING AROUND THE BOTTOM OF THE TOWER!
Shimph, BO-RING...
CHUCK HIM OUT THE WINDOW AND FIND ME SOME DEVIANTS TO KILL!
RIGHTO, GUV. THIS WINDOW HERE, IS IT?

WORLD OF HEROS

If you don't know what this column is about now, you will never understand... Chris Spicer

Joe Quesada's "Ducks are shit" Shocker

JOE QUESADA, recently voted Marvel Editor-In-Chief Most Likely To Have Eaten All The Pies, used an interview last week to launch an astonishing tirade against ducks.

Quesada, who was being interviewed about the recent *Spider-Man* movie, instigated the diatribe after being asked a seemingly innocent question about the possibility of a sequel to the popular film. "I hate ducks, you know?", Quesada told the surprised interviewer. "They just sit around in lakes all day, swimming and shitting. Stupid ducks, they think they're so clever with their beady eyes and their '*We're watching you, Joe*,' but I know what they're really up to. I do, but they keep trying to stop me telling people. Feathery fucking bastards. They go through my garbage, you know, all the way through. I hate them so much, the way they just sit there quacking all the time. Except they're not quacking, they're laughing at me. They sit there, mocking me with their beaks. Laughing at me! Bastards."

This attitude is at odds with a recent corporate promotional video for Marvel, during which a smiling Quesada can clearly be seen stroking and licking a duck for a full five minutes.

A spokesperson for Marvel told us: "Joe's been under a lot of pressure lately. His comments were made during a period of great stress and while quite drunk, and therefore shouldn't be reported on. Ever. If you know what I mean, because computers are so easily broken, and there are so many burglaries these days. I think we understand each other."

In other news, claims that Marvel is being run by a sinister and mysterious cult were recently denied by Bill Jemas, or, as he now insists we call him, The Grand High Priest of Ultimate Evil.

Above: Footage from Marvel's promotional video. [Ten-metre long inflatable lobster not pictured.]

"Indie comics are best!" says indie comic creator

All mainstream comics are crap, and the people who buy them are morons. That's the astonishing view of indie comic creator Roberta Cord, who used a seminar at a local comics festival to decry the entire comics industry and anyone who bought comics made by it.

"The comic industry is a whore, selling its scabrous wares on the streets of commerciality," ranted Cord at the seminar. "It lies back smiling as stinking corporate fatcats fuck it up the ass with rolls of banknotes, while the buying public just watch, giggling and masturbating and throwing handfuls of shit in appreciation. It's a filthy, rotten corpse, but the bastard children of Wall Street are still gonna dry-hump it till its eyes pop out from the sockets and its head explodes in a shower of stinking pus." It is thought that the seminar attendees, called to discuss ways of encouraging children to read comics and therefore consisting mostly of under-tens, largely missed the point of Cord's attack.

Cord, whose own comic, **Pre-Teen Hugtoy Nightmare**, tells the harrowing tale of two sexually and emotionally abused children in graphic detail through the eyes of their suicidally depressed teddy bear, was unrepentant yesterday. "I mean, I go into my local comic shop, and what do I see? People walking around carrying armloads of comics like **X-Men** and **Batman**, while my comic languishes on the shelves, alongside other greats of the medium like **Homeless And Hungry**, **Spiralling Drug Hell** and **Tales From War-Torn Cambodia**. What's wrong with people these days?"

Rick Witter, owner of Flack's local comic shop, told us "People do realise that there are other comics out there, like Roberta's. That doesn't mean they want to read stories about a stuffed toy who has to watch his owners being slapped around and then starts cutting himself, does it?"

A final word from Cord: "People need to remember that there are other comics out there, comics that can really challenge or disturb you. I mean, you'd almost think that all people want from comics is to be entertained!"

Comic shop burglary bad news for everyone

ARSELICK, OREGON: The poor standing in which comics are held by the general public was demonstrated again recently when three youths committed a burglary in a comics shop – and left without taking anything.

The break-in, which took place on the night of the 14th, was at Fantastic Voyages Comics Emporium. We talked to Fantastic's manager, Zachary Stickshifter, who told us: "We got some CCTV footage of three kids who broke into the store from the alley round back. You can't see much, but they bumble around in the dark for a bit, realise that they've broken into a comic book store, look disgusted and leave. At one point you can hear one of the kids say something about getting out of the store before they 'catch geek, or something.'"

Local townsfolk are horrified by the incident. "It's terrible. You hear of these things in the big city, but here in our little community? Terrible," rambled local busybody Rosie Evans, 72. "I mean, really. Running a comic book store in this day and age. I thought we got rid of all those filthy communist comic book nerds during the Fifties."

We talked to local Chief of Police Carsey Werner, who told us "We're doing everything we can to look into this crime, short of actually visiting the store and looking for evidence. What, you want us to catch geek or something?"

Below - An artist's impression of one of the shoplifters.

Disclaimer: World of Heros is a spoof news column and the stories in it are purely for fun, so if you don't understand them or you take them seriously, you're either very sad or in need of medical attention. Any similarity between this and anything else is purely intentional.